Monday, March 16, 2026 No 75 ₹7

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The Power of Good

Wangchuk's release signals tactical pause

Indication that Modi govt may be trying to defuse tension in UT

Night to savour for Binny, Dravid

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B'deshi held in WB for 'aiding' killers of Hadi to escape to India

KOLKATA, PTI: The West Bengal Police's STF arrested a Bangladeshi for allegedly helping the suspected killers of Sharif Osman Hadi, a youth leader from the neighbouring country, flee to India after committing the crime, an officer said on Sunday.

The arrest comes a week after the Special Task Force (STF) apprehended two suspects wanted in connection with Hadi's murder from Bongaon in the North 24 Parganas district.

The accused were identified as Faisal Karim Masud (37), alias Rahul, a resident of Patuakhali in Bangladesh, and Alamgir Hossain (34) from Dhaka.

During interrogation, the two men told investigators that a person named Philip Sangma had helped them cross the international border in Meghalaya, the police officer said.

Acting on a tip-off, the STF tracked down Sangma and arrested him on Saturday morning from the Shantipur Bypass area in West Bengal's Nadia district, the officer added.

A preliminary interrogation revealed that Sangma, also a Bangladesh national, who allegedly facilitates infiltration through the border in Haluaghat (Bangladesh) and Dalupara (Meghalaya) areas in exchange for money, another officer said.

'BJP could have stopped Iran war to become vishwa-guru'

MUMBAI, DHNS: Slamming the Narendra Modi-led Centre for failing to handle the crisis involving West Asia, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav described Liquified Petroleum Gas (LPG) as 'lapata-gas' and said that the BJP failed to become a 'vishwa-guru' by intervening and stopping the war in Iran.

"The new word for LPG is not liquefied petroleum gas but 'lapata-gas'...the prices of petrol, diesel and essential commodities are rising," Yadav, on a two-day visit to Mumbai, said.

"When the BJP had the opportunity to become a 'vishwa-guru', they failed. If they wanted to become a global leader, they should have spread India's eternal message of peace and opposed the war...today we are seeing its impact in India as well," he said, adding that the ongoing conflict has impacted small businesses, hotels and households.

On the Assembly elections, he said the EC must ensure free and fair polls.

High-stakes Rajya Sabha polls in Bihar, Haryana & Odisha

Cong secures MLAs in Haryana, Odisha to prevent cross-voting

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Rajya Sabha elections will be held in Bihar, Haryana, and Odisha on Monday, with the ruling BJP-led NDA attempting to minimise the Opposition's winning prospects in three seats by backing two Independents linked to the saffron party and RLM chief Upendra Kushwaha.

Their victory will require cross-voting from the Opposition in the states where the NDA is in power. Fearing defections, the Congress has moved most of its 14 MLAs in Odisha to Bengaluru and 31 of 37 in Haryana to Himachal Pradesh.

Adding to the Congress' worries in Odisha, its MLA Dasarathi Gamang is untraceable, and the party has issued a show-cause notice to him. Meanwhile, its vocal MLA Sofia Firdous has expressed resentment over the party's decision to join hands with the BJD, which she called the BJP's "B-Team". She also claimed that she was excluded from poll preparations.

So far, 26 candidates — seven from the BJP, five from the Congress, four from the Trinamool, three from the DMK, and one each from the Shiv Sena, RPI(A), NCP, NCP(SP), AIADMK, PMK, and the UPPL — have been elected unopposed in seven states. The winners include Sharad Pawar, Abhishek Singhvi, Tiruchi Siva, and Vinod Tawade.

BATTLE OF SEATS

- NDA attempts to minimise the Opposition's winning prospects in three seats by backing two Independents and RLM chief
- Fearing defections, Congress moves its MLAs in Odisha to Bengaluru and from Haryana to Himachal
- Odisha will witness voting for the RS elections after a gap of 12 years, as five candidates are in the fray for four seats

The contest in Bihar is certain to see Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, BJP president Nitin Nabin, Union minister Ram Nath Thakur of the JD(U), and the BJP's Shivesh Kumar getting into the Rajya Sabha, but the RLM's Upendra Kushwaha, who is three short of 41 first-preference votes, will have to depend on cross-voting or second-preference votes.

The NDA is confident of Kushwaha's victory, saying it has enough votes, amid speculation of some of the six Congress MLAs jumping ship.

The I.N.D.I.A bloc, which has fielded sitting RJD MP A D Singh, is staring at some trouble as it is short of six votes and will have to bank on five AIMIM legislators and a BSP MLA.

In Haryana, the Congress has the numbers to get Karamvir Boudh elected, but BJP leader Satish Nandal, who is fighting as an Independent, has queered the pitch.

The BJP has 48 MLAs, besides the support of three Independents. With a candidate needing only 31 first-preference votes, the surplus is all set to go to Nandal. The BJP is also banking on cross-voting from Congress MLAs upset about the candidate selection.

Former Union minister Dilip Ray's entry in Odisha as an Independent has muddied the election scene. The BJP has fielded two candidates, while the BJD has fielded Santrupt Misra and propped up common candidate Datteswar Hota with the Congress' support.

While the election of the BJP's Manmohan Samal and Sujeet Kumar and the BJD's Misra is certain, the BJD-Congress candidate's win is uncertain as Ray is believed to have the political resources to tilt the Opposition camp to his side.

Parliament resumes amid political showdowns

NEW DELHI, DHNS

Parliament will resume work on Monday with the passage of the Budget on the agenda this week, amid the ruling NDA and Opposition I.N.D.I.A all geared to further sharpen their political knives with the announcement of the schedule for elections in four states and a Union Territory.

Both sides will not leave any opportunity to hit each other, even as the Opposition is demanding a discussion on the war situation in West Asia and subsequent troubles for India. The Opposition will also be seeking a positive response from the government over the revocation of the suspension of its eight MPs.

The resumption of Parliament comes against the backdrop of the BJP attacking LoP Rahul Gandhi, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi writing to Speaker Om Birla.

Modi wrote to Birla, saying the resolution seeking his removal as Speaker was driven by motives of self-interest and that certain individuals steeped in "dynastic mindset" want to confine democratic institutions within their own narrow spheres. Birla too wrote to floor leaders against MPs "undermining the dignity and prestige" of Parliamentary democracy.

The indications are that the ruling NDA is unwilling to give a breather to the Opposition, which is escalating its protest over the LPG crisis the country is facing, over the war in West Asia. Congress has already asked why the PM is not condoling the assassination of the Iranian Supreme leader Ayottallah Ali Khamanei.

Opposition sources said Congress Chief Whip Kodikkunnil Suresh had demanded a discussion on West Asia during a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of Lok Sabha last Friday. While the government has not committed, it has told the Opposition that they would consider the demand.

The Opposition is also likely to press the Lok Sabha Speaker and Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan to take a call on their notices seeking removal of CEC Gyanesh Kumar and set up the mandatory committee to probe the allegations before moving ahead with his impeachment.

With Thursday and Friday to be holidays owing to festivals, the Parliament is likely to function next weekend during which it is speculated that an important bill is likely to be brought.

CBI nabs 'cyber-slavery' recruiter

NEW DELHI, PTI: The CBI has arrested a Kanpur-based recruiter, accused of sending Indians to "cyber-slavery compounds" in South East Asia where they were allegedly forced to run scams targeting people back home, officials said on Sunday.

The accused, Krishna Kumar Lakhwani, allegedly lured young persons through ads promising lucrative jobs such as data entry or customer support roles abroad, charging $300-400 for the same.

He allegedly made travel arrangements, and many were transported through Delhi to Cambodia, where they were coerced into participating in cyber-fraud operations, according to officials.

"Based on the source information and surveillance, the accused was tracked and intercepted upon his arrival in India and brought to the CBI office for questioning," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

In the "cyber scam compounds", the victims were subjected to intimidation, confiscation of passports and, in some cases, wrongful confinement, it further said.

They were allegedly forced to engage in cybercrimes such as digital arrests under threats and abusive conditions turning them into "cyber slaves", it added.

Indian tanker leaves Fujairah safely amid attack

Jag Laadki is fourth vessel to come out of war zone

AJITH ATHRADY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The Centre on Sunday said that an Indian-flagged crude tanker sailed out safely from the UAE's Fujairah after loading oil, despite an attack on the oil terminal.

WAR SHOCKS

The vessel, Jag Laadki, carrying about 80,800 tonnes of Murban crude oil, departed Fujairah at 1030 hrs IST and is bound for India, with all crew members safe, the government said in an update on preparedness measures. This is the fourth Indian-flagged vessel to have come out of the war zone unharmed.

"On March 14, 2026, while the Indian-flag vessel Jag Laadki was loading crude oil at the Fujairah Single Point Mooring, the Fujairah oil terminal was attacked. The vessel sailed safely from Fujairah at 1030 hrs IST today (Sunday) carrying about 80,800 tonnes of Murban crude oil, and is bound for India," the update said.

On Saturday, two Indian-flag LPG carriers—Shivalik and Nanda Devi—carrying about 92,712 tonnes of LPG crossed the war-hit Strait of Hormuz. Shivalik is due to reach Mundra port in Gujarat on March 16, and Nanda Devi would dock at Kandla port on March 17, according to the update.

The government said Indian vessels and seafarers operating in the region remain safe, and maritime operations are being closely monitored. At present, 22 Indian-flagged vessels with 611 seafarers remain on the west side of the Persian Gulf region.

The Director General of Shipping has facilitated the safe repatriation of 276 Indian seafarers from the Gulf region so far, including 23 repatriations in the past 24 hours from airports and regional locations.

India imports about 88% of its crude oil, 50% of its natural gas, and 60% of its LPG needs. Before the US-Israel strikes on Iran on February 28 and Tehran's retaliation, more than half of India's crude imports, about 30% of gas and 85-90% of LPG imports came from West Asian countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

India engages Gulf partners as West Asia tensions rise

NEW DELHI, PTI

Against the backdrop of spiralling hostilities between Iran and the US, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his counterparts from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), focusing on various aspects of the evolving situation in West Asia.

Jaishankar held phone conversations with UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan on Saturday night.

"Discussed ongoing developments related to the conflict in West Asia," the external affairs minister said on Sunday about his talks with the Saudi foreign minister.

On his conversation with Zayed Al Nahyan, Jaishankar said, "Exchanged views on various aspects of the regional situation."

S Jaishankar

It is learnt that India's energy security figured in Jaishankar's conversations with both foreign ministers.

Global oil and gas prices have surged after Iran virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman that handles roughly 20% of global oil and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas).

West Asia has been a major source of India's energy procurement.

The external affairs minister's conversation also came at a time India has been trying to forge a consensus position among the BRICS nations on the conflict.

India is the current chair of the influential bloc, which recently expanded to include Iran, the UAE, and some other countries.

Iran's counter-offensive against the UAE and other Gulf nations following the February 28 US-Israel strikes on Iranian targets has triggered some disquiet within the grouping.

As the chair of the grouping, India is now navigating the challenge of finding a common position for BRICS on the conflict.

Drones, burning ships: Stranded Indian sailors want to go home

NEW DELHI, REUTERS

Stranded for two weeks at the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas as drones and missiles set ships ablaze nearby, 26-year-old seafarer Ambuj says he has not been home for six months and cannot wait to see his family.

Ambuj is one of about 23,000 Indians working on merchant, harbour and offshore vessels across the wider Gulf region, which is bearing the brunt of the war between Iran and the United States and Israel.

Hundreds of tankers and cargo ships have been waiting to pass through the Strait of Hormuz, where Iranian attacks have killed three Indian crew members and left another missing. The plight of Indian sailors in and around the Strait has become a major issue at home, with Delhi saying it is coordinating with multiple authorities, including in Iran, to ensure their safety.

"We know how dangerous it could be to sail without a navy escort or without permission," Ambuj said by phone from his ship, stuck with 15 other crew members and surrounded by more than 50 other ships.

"The company I work for has released us from duty, and we are now waiting for safe passage because flights from Tehran are not operating. If we get clearance to sail to the Middle East or anywhere nearby, we will dock there and take the earliest flight home," he said.

Bound for a Southeast Asian country, Ambuj said the crew panicked early in March when the captain received a warning over wireless from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that passing through the Strait would have consequences.

The crew initially waited for clearance to sail, but it never came. They are now coming to terms with the possibility of being stranded for many more days, Ambuj said.

M Kanta, aboard an India-bound ship, said the crew had spotted drones and fighter jets flying past and feared for their lives, especially after Iranian authorities ordered their Starlink internet disconnected in early March.

"There have been sirens. We saw fire on a ship at a distance and received warning messages on wireless. We got permission to restart Starlink after March 6 ... and we have been able to communicate with our families and receive verified news. Our hearts sink every time we see or hear drones or a fighter jet."

Kanta said the authorities have asked the crew not to share details of their ship or location for safety reasons.

Hyd: TDP MP, ex-BRS MLA test positive after drug raid

HYDERABAD, PTI: TDP MP from Andhra Pradesh Putta Mahesh Kumar and former BRS MLA Pilot Rohith Reddy were among 11 people detained here following an alleged drug bust at a farmhouse in Moinabad near here, though the MP and seven others were subsequently released on Sunday, officials said.

Putta Mahesh Kumar

Mahesh Kumar, Rohith Reddy and four others had tested positive for alleged drug consumption, they said.

On reliable information that several individuals had gathered at the farmhouse in Moinabad near here, owned by Rohith, and were celebrating a party with possession of narcotic and psychotropic substances along with a large quantity of liquor, the Elite Action Group for Drug Law Enforcement (EAGLE) Force, in coordination with local police teams, raided it on Saturday night.

A businessman was among those detained for allegedly opening fire three rounds in the air with a revolver during the party, and later one round towards the police team.

Based on preliminary investigation, they said the person who opened fire is suspected to have resorted to the act under the influence of drugs. A .32 calibre revolver, along with live and empty cartridges, were seized.

Eleven individuals who attended the party were tested on the spot using Urine Drug Testing Kits, and five among them, including Rohith Reddy, tested positive for drug consumption, while the Eluru MP tested negative initially.

During the search, cocaine weighing 0.26 grams was recovered from one of the accused. In addition, large quantities of liquor were seized from the farmhouse.

A case was registered under the NDPS Act, Arms Act, Telangana State Excise Act and BNS.

As part of further procedures, they were taken to a government hospital and upon re-testing with blood samples, the results confirmed that six people, including the MP, tested positive for drugs, EAGLE Force Superintendent of Police R Giridhar told reporters. "The MP initially tested negative for drug consumption, but he tested positive in the blood test," the official said.

Sonam Wangchuk's release signals tactical pause

ZULFIKAR MAJID
SRINAGAR, DHNS

The release of Ladakh-based climate activist Sonam Wangchuk after months in detention has injected fresh momentum into the cold desert region's agitation for constitutional safeguards, even as it signals a possible attempt by the Centre to defuse tensions in the strategically sensitive Union Territory.

Wangchuk, who had been detained under the National Security Act since September last year following violent protests in Leh, was released after the Ministry of Home Affairs revoked the preventive detention order.

His arrest had triggered sharp reactions in Ladakh, where political groups have been pressing for constitutional protections since the region was carved out of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and made a separate Union Territory in 2019.

Leaders of the movement have described Wangchuk's release as a validation of the agitation but stressed that the core demands remain unresolved.

"This is not just about Wangchuk but about the whole of Ladakh... Today Ladakh stands vindicated," said Chering Dorjey, co-chairman of the Leh Apex Body (LAB), adding that the decision would give "fresh momentum" to the ongoing campaign.

Sonam Wangchuk with wife Gitanjali Angmo after his release from Jodhpur Central Jail. PTI

The agitation is being spearheaded by two key political platforms—LAB and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)—which have jointly raised four demands: full statehood for Ladakh, inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, separate parliamentary representation, and greater local control over governance and recruitment.

The movement has gathered momentum since 2023, with mass protests, shutdowns and hunger strikes led by Wangchuk and civil society groups. Ladakhi leaders argue that the absence of a legislature since 2019 has left the region with limited say over land, jobs and development policies.

Several rounds of talks between representatives of the LAB and KDA, and the Centre have so far failed to yield a breakthrough.

Tensions escalated sharply in September 2025 when protests in Leh turned violent during a police crackdown, leaving four people dead. Wangchuk was detained soon after under the NSA.

Leaders from Kargil also welcomed the move. "The revocation of NSA against Sonam Wangchuk is a welcome step. However, our struggle for our legitimate rights continues," said Sajjad Kargili, founding member of the KDA.

Assam insurgent groups sign final pact 14 years after giving up arms

SUMIR KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI, DHNS

MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH

- Assam govt signs deals with 3 Kuki groups (UKDA, KRA, KLO/KLA) and Hmar outfit HPC-D
- Govt says agreements mark the end of ethnic militancy in the state
- Groups had laid down arms in 2012 under the Suspension of Operations pact
- Kuki and Hmar welfare councils to be set up with dedicated budgets
- Cadres to be rehabilitated; families of slain militants to receive compensation

Fourteen years after bidding a farewell to arms, five insurgent groups in Assam on Sunday signed final agreements that promised to set up special development councils for the Kuki and Hmar communities.

The pacts were signed in Guwahati in the presence of Assam Education Minister Ranoj Pegu a couple of hours before the Election Commission announced the dates for Assembly polls in several states, including Assam.

The groups that signed the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) were the United Kukigam Defence Army (UKDA), the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), the Kuki Liberation Organisation (KLO), the Kuki Liberation Army (KLA), and the Hmar People's Convention-Democratic (HPC-D).

The UKDA was formed in 2010, while the KRA came into being in 2000 in Karbi Anglong, a hilly district in central Assam. The KLO and the KLA were formed in 1992 and 1993 in the neighbouring Dima Hasao district. The HPC-D was formed by some Hmar youths in 2003/2004.

The groups were involved in violent attacks with other communities as well as with the security forces before they were convinced to lay down arms in 2012.

"Both the MoSes envisage the formation of a Kuki Welfare and Development Council and a Hmar Welfare Development Council in the Kuki and Hmar-dominated areas of Assam. There will be budget provisions for both councils, which will be prepared by the councils as per their requirements, and submitted to the Transformation and Development Department for the state government's approval," said the Assam government in a statement.

"The state government will also take steps for the rehabilitation of the cadres of the armed groups as per the existing procedure. Moreover, the family members of the cadres who lost their lives during the armed struggle will be provided financial compensation by the government," it added.

Similar accords were signed with armed groups comprising youths from Bodo, Karbi, Adivasi, and Dimasa communities, as well as with the Arabinda Rajkhowa-led group of Ulfa. More than 9,000 cadres laid down weapons and joined the mainstream.

"With these two MoSes, the ethnic militancy comes to an end in Assam," said the government in the statement.

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The Power of Good

Antonelli soars in Shanghai

Italian becomes second-youngest race winner in Formula 1 history

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Business P.8

Stay patient amid geopolitical tensions: Sebi chief's advice to investors

Nation

Vijay appears before CBI in Karur stampede case P.10

Nation

TDP MP, ex-BRS MLA test positive after drug raid

World

7 Indians killed in Nepal bus accident **P.11**

Quickly

Kejriwal, Sisodia approach SC

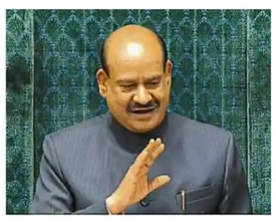
AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal and senior leader Manish Sisodia have approached the Supreme Court following the rejection of their request to transfer the CBI plea against their discharge in the excise policy case to another Delhi High Court judge, the party said on Sunday.

Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, D K Upadhyaya, has declined the request of Arvind Kejriwal and others to transfer the CBI's plea from Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma.

'Confer Bharat Ratna on Kanshi Ram'

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to confer Dalit icon Kanshi Ram with the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, stating that the leader had transformed the nature of Indian politics and raised political awareness among 'Bahujans' and the poor.

Details on Page 10



Maintain discipline in House: Birla

Speaker Om Birla on Sunday shot off letters to floor leaders in Lok Sabha calling for "serious reflection and analysis" on some MPs "undermining the dignity and prestige" of India's Parliamentary democracy through the "kind of words being used and the conduct and behaviour". His letters come close on the heels of PM Modi writing to him for his "patience, restraint, and impartiality" and heralding a "new political culture".

2-phase polls for WB; 1 phase for 3 others

Voting between April 9–29, results on May 4

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Elections to Assemblies in four states and a Union Territory will be held between April 9 and April 29.

West Bengal will witness a leaner exercise with two phases, instead of eight, as in the last election, while the others will see single-phase polls.

Kerala, Assam and Puducherry will go to the polling booths on April 9, while Tamil Nadu will vote on April 23.

Polling in West Bengal is scheduled for April 23 in 152 seats and on April 29 in 142 seats. The results will be declared on May 4.

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar told the press that 17.4 crore voters are eligible to vote in the elections. The number of voters of the four states and the union territory is equivalent to the population of Australia, France, South Africa, Germany and Canada.

The announcement of the poll schedule comes in the midst of Opposition parties submitting notices seeking Kumar's removal. The CEC did not respond to questions on the notices.

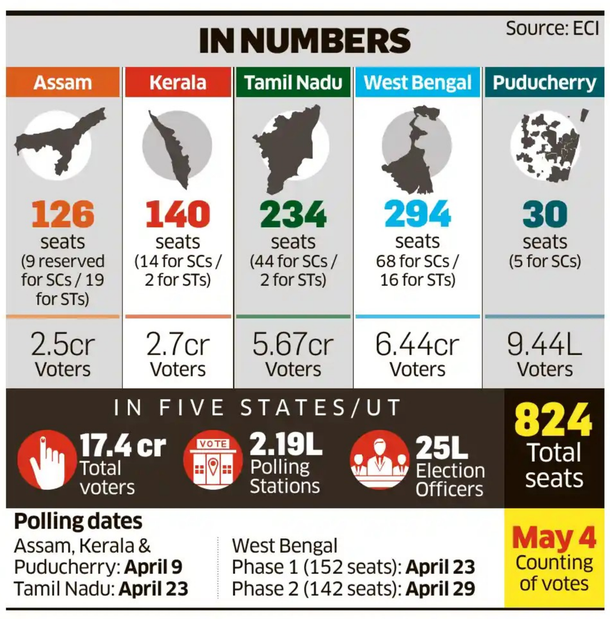
West Bengal, with 294 seats, will see a fierce contest with Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress seeking a consecutive fourth term while BJP is hoping to tilt the balance in its favour in a state where the Congress and the Left Front are in the margins.

Assam, with 126 seats, will see the BJP seek a third term while Congress is working hard to overturn its electoral misfortunes of the past 10 years.

MK Stalin-led DMK will be seeking a second term in Tamil Nadu while the AIADMK-BJP alliance is trying to challenge it even as Tamil voters will decide on how to treat superstar Vijay's entry into the poll arena.

CPM-led LDF is banking on social security measures for a third term in Kerala, while the Congress wants to reverse its two Assembly defeats and the BJP is hoping to improve its position.

All India NR Congress in Puducherry, in alliance with AIADMK and BJP, will face a challenge for retaining power from the DMK-Congress combine.



Cong, BJP face-off in bypolls

The Congress and BJP will lock horns on April 9 in the byelections to the Davangere South and Bagalkot Assembly seats, both currently held by the Congress. The bypolls have been necessitated by the deaths of Congress veterans H Y Meti.

P 3

Modi govt faces global headwinds

The Assembly elections are being held with the Modi government facing one of the stiffest foreign policy challenges. The sparks of the West Asia conflict are flying beyond the Persian Gulf as the rising crude prices adds another variable to what would have been localised contests.

P 5

Bengal govt clears DA arrears

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee beat the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct in the state by less than an hour to announce the long-pending payments of Dearness Allowance (DA) arrears for the state government employees.

P 5

Latest in West Asia

- Israeli military announces a wave of strikes against targets in western Iran
- 8 injured in Israel following repeated missile launches from Iran
- Drone attack on Ali Al Salem airbase in Kuwait hosting Italian and US forces
- Hezbollah fires missile at Israel's Palmachim air base south of Tel Aviv
- Israeli strike in south Lebanon area kills a Hamas official

No talks: Iran FM; Tehran warns nations

Trump rules out deal; oil reserves to start flowing from today

TEHRAN/DUBAI, AGENCIES

Iran ruled out talks and warned more countries against getting involved in its war with the United States and Israel on Sunday, after President Donald Trump urged world powers to escort oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz.

Energy prices have soared across the world since Iran responded to the US-Israeli campaign by threatening shipping sailing through the strait.

Trump on Saturday urged "China, France, Japan, South Korea, the UK and others" to send ships to escort tankers. But the countries he listed have so far given only a guarded reception to the idea, and Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi, in a call with French counterpart Jean-Noel Barrot, warned them to "refrain from any action that could lead to escalation and expansion of the conflict".

As global markets reel, Trump has doubled down, saying he thought Tehran was keen to come to the table but that the US would fight on to enforce better terms.

▸ Iran, Page 4

An Israeli howitzer artillery gun fires rounds towards Lebanon from a position in northern Israel on Sunday. AFP

Jaishankar hails talks with Iran: Report

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar hailed direct talks with Iran as the most effective way to restart shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, in an interview published on Sunday. "I am at the moment engaged in talking to them and my talking has yielded some results...From India's perspective, it is better that we reason with Iran and we co-ordinate and we get a solution than we don't," he told the Financial Times.

19 Indians face arrest in UAE, Page 11

3 cops killed in accident

CHALLAKERE (CHITRADURGA DISTRICT), DHNS: Three policemen died and two others sustained injuries after the car they were travelling in rammed into a lorry near Heggere Gate in Challakere taluk, Chitradurga district, in the early hours of Sunday.

Five policemen had left Bengaluru and were on their way to Ballari.

Manjunath Darimani (32) was driving the vehicle.

Darimani, Amaresh (25) and Sachin (31) were killed on the accident spot, while Eshwar and Mahantesh Bommanavar suffered grievous injuries and are undergoing treatment at a hospital in Davanagere, said the police.

Details on Page 4

'Op Lotus at Bidadi resort; Cong Odisha MLAs offered Rs 5 cr each'

BENGALURU, DHNS

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar claimed on Sunday that 'Operation Lotus' was underway ahead of the Rajya Sabha polls in Odisha, saying that four persons from the eastern state had unsuccessfully offered Rs 5 crore per head for cross-voting to the Odisha MLAs of Congress staying at a resort in Bidadi.

Speaking to reporters, he said: "Four persons, who came from Odisha, booked a room through a native Byatarayanapura resident named Suresh. Later, when they tried to lure our MLAs, our MLAs informed us about it. Of course, a police complaint has already been lodged. Of those four, two have been arrested, while two others have escaped. Those two have accepted that this was the motive. They had come with empty cheques, and through this, 'Operation Lotus' was being conducted."

> ...Two have been arrested, while two others have escaped. Those two have accepted that this was the motive. They had come with empty cheques, and through this, 'Operation Lotus' was being conducted.
>
> **D K SHIVAKUMAR**
> Deputy Chief Minister

Shivakumar, who is also the KPCC president, said the police had confiscated the cheques and would conduct a mahazar.

The alleged attempt to bribe legislators comes against the backdrop of the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections in Odisha, where the BJD-Congress consensus candidate Dr Datteshwar Hota requires 30 votes from MLAs to become an MP.

As a precautionary measure, eight Congress MLAs are being housed in a resort in Bidadi. According to Shivakumar's office, the Odisha MLAs are Rajan Ekka, Ashok Das, Kadraka Appala Swamy, Mangu Killo, Pavitra Sauntha, Nilamadhav Hikka, Prafulla Pradhan and Sathyajit Gomongo.

▸ Operation Lotus, Page 4

Notice to acquire over 7,000 acres for Bidadi Township soon

NAVEEN MENEZES
BENGALURU, DHNS

The final notification for land acquisition for the proposed Bidadi Integrated Township is likely to be issued soon, with the state government moving ahead with plans to acquire about 7,400 acres across nine villages in Bengaluru South district.

This is going to be a significant step as it legally confirms the acquisition process and enables the government to begin compensation and take possession of the land.

It also comes amid pressure from a certain section of farmers and leaders, including H D Kumaraswamy.

Officials said the Greater Bangalore Development Authority had already submitted details of the land parcels to the government, and the proposal was now awaiting approval from the cabinet. P Rajendra Cholan, Commissioner, GBDA, said the authority expected the cabinet nod anytime soon.

"This is the first such project where the preliminary notification was issued in one go. In the last year, the joint measurement committee has also completed the task of measuring the land, assessing structures and marking the boundaries," he told *DH*.

▸ Bidadi, Page 4

Rs 2,000-cr seed fund for Bidadi township, Page 2

Using FASTag? Pay more for annual pass from April 1

NEW DELHI, DHNS: The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) on Sunday announced a revision in the FASTag Annual Pass fee for the financial year 2026–27 from the current Rs 3,000 to Rs 3,075.

The increased fee will come into effect from April 1, 2026.

The revision has been made in line with the provisions of the National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008.

The FASTag Annual Pass has been gaining popularity among private vehicle owners, with more than 56 lakh users currently availing the facility, the NHAI said in a statement.

The revised rate will be applicable for eligible non-commercial vehicles with a valid FASTag seeking to avail the annual pass facility at about 1,150 toll plazas on national highways and national expressways.

The FASTag Annual Pass allows users to avoid frequent recharges by paying a one-time fee that remains valid for one year or for up to 200 toll plaza crossings, whichever comes earlier.

The facility is designed to make highway travel more convenient and cost-effective for regular commuters, the statement said.

▸ FASTag, Page 4

EVEN IF YOUR SUGAR LEVEL IS UNDER CONTROL IN DIABETES, YOU ARE NOT COMPLETELY SAFE!

RISKS CAN SILENTLY GROW INSIDE THE BODY...

Heart Disease – Coronary Artery Disease
Stroke Risk – Cerebrovascular Accident (CVA)
High Blood Pressure – Hypertension
Kidney Damage – Diabetic Nephropathy
Nerve Damage – Diabetic Neuropathy
Vision Loss – Diabetic Retinopathy
Liver Disorders – Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease
High Cholesterol – Dyslipidemia
Sexual Health Problems – Erectile Dysfunction
Gangrene & Diabetic Foot Complications

DIABETES IS A CHRONIC METABOLIC DISEASE; IT NEEDS ROOT-CAUSE CARE.

WHEN SUGAR RISES, NATURE RESPONDS WITH MEHA TONE.

MEHATONE IS AN AYURVEDIC SHIELD AGAINST DIABETES.

A POWERFUL FORMULA FOR METABOLIC BALANCE FROM KERALA AYURVEDA.

MEHA TONE

A HEALTHY METABOLISM GIVES THE BODY THE ENERGY TO NATURALLY CONTROL BLOOD SUGAR.

WARNING

- GET A BLOOD TEST DONE EVERY 10 DAYS.
- IF THERE IS NO CHANGE IN SUGAR LEVEL, ADJUST THE DOSAGE AS PRESCRIBED ON THE PACK.
- DO NOT STOP YOUR REGULAR MEDICATION ON YOUR OWN WITHOUT CONSULTING YOUR DOCTOR.

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BIG CRASH

Poultry business cracks as egg prices tumble on export woes

ASHWIN B M
BENGALURU, DHNS

The West Asia conflict has sent shockwaves through Karnataka's poultry industry, as a sudden halt in exports to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has left local markets flooded with surplus stock and farmers staring at mounting losses.

WAR SHOCKS

Prasanna N, general secretary of the Karnataka Poultry Farmers and Breeders Association (KPFBA), said that the impact had been severe.

"West Asia is a major importer of poultry. Previously, over 50 lakh hatching eggs were exported to Oman and Kuwait per month from Karnataka alone. Those sales have now dropped to zero," he told *DH*.

The sudden stoppage has resulted in a monthly loss of Rs 5-6 crore for the industry, with a loss of roughly Rs 14 per hatching egg.

While approximately 70-80 containers were shipped just before the war began, rumours of those shipments being returned have unsettled the market.

The cessation of international trade has forced export-quality stock back into the domestic market, creating a massive supply-demand imbalance.

In Karnataka, major egg-producing districts such as Mysuru, Kolar, Vijayanagar, Davangere and Koppal are seeing massive unsold stocks.

Table egg prices in the local market have plummeted after February 28 from Rs 6 to 4 in some areas within a month. In Bengaluru, the wholesale price fell from Rs 5.5 to Rs 4.8.

Prasanna warned that the situation was a race against time. "Table eggs have a shelf life of only 10-15 days. If the export block continues for another week, prices will crash further as stocks begin to spoil, leading to catastrophic losses for small-scale farmers," he added.

Street vendors and hoteliers have also significantly reduced their poultry intake.

▸ Egg price, Page 4

> West Asia is a major importer of poultry. Previously, over 50 lakh hatching eggs were exported to Oman and Kuwait per month from Karnataka alone. Those sales have now dropped to zero.
>
> **PRASANNA N**
> Karnataka Poultry Farmers and Breeders Association

LPG crisis: 25 eateries shut; more may close if supply is not restored in 2 days

Costs, menu cuts hit Sunday crowd; industry faces Rs 100-cr loss

ASHWIN BM
BENGALURU, DHNS

With the supply chain disruption continuing due to the West Asia crisis, Bengaluru hoteliers and street food vendors are scrambling to find alternatives.

Amid prolonged shortage of commercial LPG cylinders, food vendors — right from South Bengaluru's darshinis to Shivajinagar's Iftar stalls — are trying out firewood stoves and induction cooktops.

The crisis has jacked up costs, with hotels hiking prices of food items between Rs 5 to Rs 20.

They cite higher operating costs and paying higher costs for commercial LPG cylinders on the black market, where a unit costs Rs 3,000 to Rs 5,000.

Usually packed, this popular restaurant in the city saw fewer visitors on Sunday. DH PHOTO/ASHWIN BM

Bangalore Hotel Association president PC Rao said 25 hotels have shut down and more are on the brink.

The industry estimates losses due to the crises to be more than Rs 100 crore.

Hundreds working in the industry have been asked not to report to work, while some establishments have totally laid off their staff.

Hotels have also trimmed their menu from 15 items to a mere three or four to conserve cooking fuel.

Bengaluru hotels turn to firewood stoves amid LPG shortage. DH PHOTO/MS MANJUNATH

Firewood out, gas burners in

A popular Rajajinagar eatery has swapped firewood and induction stoves for gas burners.

"We have no choice," said the proprietor. "If we close the hotel, we still must pay rent and salaries. We are managing with limited menus and using induction stoves specifically for coffee and tea."

The shift to electric cooking has its own challenges, the proprietor said. "Electricity bill surges and preparation time slows down, testing the patience of the staff and customers alike," he noted.

Shawarma vendors

The impact of the crises was visible in Shivajinagar's HKP Road and Russell Market area, where several vendors have dismantled their shawarma machines or shifted to charcoal stoves.

"A cylinder that cost us Rs 1,100 is now unavailable even for Rs 3,000 on the black market," said a street food vendor. "I had to stop my shawarma machine and move to coal. There are also cases of cylinder thefts due to demand."

The Union government said steps are taken to streamline commercial LPG supply. But hotel associations warn that more small eateries will shut shop if supplies are not restored in 48 hours.

Sunday 'Baadoota' hit

Military hotels and non-vegetarian joints that are usually busy on Sundays had poor turnout this weekend. Many were closed since they could not manage the mandatory 15 to 20 cylinders required for a high-volume business.

"People look forward to their Sunday 'Baadoota' (meat feast), but many hotels are empty today," a hotel staff said. "Preparing biryani or pulses in large numbers at a short notice is not possible without gas, while setting up a wood stove in a cramped kitchen is not feasible for many."

WAR SHOCKS

CM urges Centre to fix LPG shortage

BENGALURU, DHNS: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday said he had written to the Union government, urging it to provide alternatives to address the ongoing LPG cylinder shortage.

Speaking to reporters, he said, "The government has already addressed this in the Legislature. Many people depend on hotels for their meals, and any disruption in hotel services will affect daily life. Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri has assured that there won't be any problem in LPG supply."

Hits back at BJP

Siddaramaiah also reacted to criticism from BJP leaders that the LPG supply issue was unique to Karnataka. "Instead of talking, let them ensure that LPG is supplied."

Shopkeeper booked for hoarding LPG cylinders

BENGALURU, DHNS: A shopkeeper in western Bengaluru has been booked for illegally hoarding LPG cylinders and selling them at a premium price.

Kengeri police conducted a raid at Mahalakshmi Enterprises in Mylasandra following complaints that gas cylinders of various companies were being stored at the shop to create artificial shortage and later sell them at higher prices.

Mahantagouda Tadlagi, 40, a food inspector from Bengaluru South taluk, filed a police complaint on March 14, leading to the search operation.

Unauthorised storage

"Upon inspection, it was found that the owner of Mahalakshmi Enterprises had stored gas cylinders of various companies without authorisation with an intention of cheating customers," the FIR noted.

Rs 2,000-cr seed fund for Bidadi township

SPV to develop a mixed-use township

NAVEEN MENEZES
BENGALURU, DHNS

If the Bidadi Integrated Township project was a start-up, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA) would be its angel investor.

For the first time, the authority has offered to provide seed money of a whopping Rs 2,000 crore for the project, which is planned across nine villages in Bengaluru South district.

According to official sources, the government will form a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to undertake the township project, which is envisioned as a mix of residential areas, office spaces, commercial establishments and open spaces. Last year, the government issued a preliminary notification to acquire about 8,943 acres for the project.

The BDA will be an equity holder in the SPV along with the Bangalore Metropolitan Region Development Authority (BMRDA).

"We have submitted the proposal to the government for approval," a senior BDA official said.

Some of the local planning authorities (LPAs) under the BMRDA, such as Ramanagara and Anekal, have also promised to contribute Rs 500 crore as seed money for the township, *DH* has learnt. The funds will be used not only for land acquisition, but also for developing basic infrastructure in the township.

Nine villages identified for the township

Byramangala, Bannigiri, Hosur, Vaderahalli, Kanchuganahalli, Kempayyanapalya, KG Gollarapalya, Mandalahalli, Aralalusandra

On average, the government plans to provide compensation of Rs 2 crore to Rs 2.5 crore per acre, or offer 40% of the relinquished land in the form of developed sites. However, some farmers have opposed the acquisition.

Apart from internal resources, the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) has agreed to provide a loan of Rs 20,000 crore. Companies such as Toyota and Foxconn have already shown interest in setting up establishments in the township, sources said.

Extension of time

Meanwhile, the Greater Bengaluru Development Authority (GBDA) has sought an extension to complete the land acquisition process.

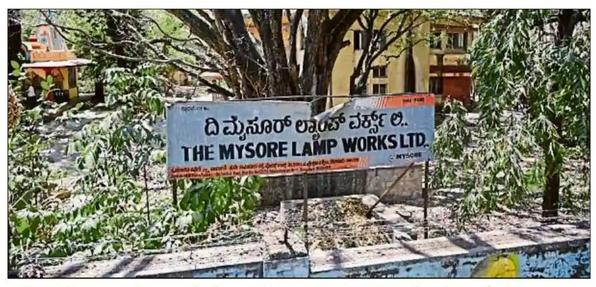
In a notification issued recently, the government extended the deadline from March 12, 2026, to March 11, 2027, citing delays in issuing the final notification.

"Since this is a large-scale project and involves acquiring 10,450 plots, the exercise could not be completed within the earlier deadline. The extension is a routine process, and there has been no delay in completing the work," an official said.

'No convention centre at Mysore Lamps factory'

BENGALURU, DHNS

The state government's proposal to establish a convention centre on the premises of the now-defunct Mysore Lamps factory in Bengaluru has triggered opposition from residents and civic groups, who want the land to be preserved as a public green space.



The 22-acre, long-defunct Mysore Lamps factory is home to over 100 mature trees, potentially qualifying it as a forest under the Supreme Court guidelines. DH PHOTO/BK JANARDHAN

In the recent state budget, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced that the government plans to develop an international convention centre at the Mysore Lamps factory site in Malleswaram under a public-private partnership (PPP) model.

The factory, spread over about 22 acres, has remained defunct since 2003.

Residents of Malleswaram have urged the government to instead declare the land a public green space or a "deemed forest", citing its ecological and historical significance.

In a representation submitted to authorities, including the Bengaluru West City Corporation, citizens said the site is one of the last large green spaces left in the neighbourhood, which has witnessed rapid urbanisation over the past few decades.

According to the letter, signed by Kaustabh Rau, Preeti Sunderajan and Benson Issac, the factory premises has dense tree cover with more than 100 mature trees and could qualify as a forest under the Supreme Court of India's interpretation of forest areas.

The residents have urged the government to hold consultations with local residents and civil society groups before taking any decision on redeveloping the land.

The Mysore Lamps factory, established in 1936, was historically part of the Mallegal Valley forest region that once extended across Yeshwantpur, Jarakabande Kaval, Kethumaranahalli, Laggere and Peenya villages.

Residents argued that preserving the site would help retain a vestige of the area's natural heritage.

◆ IN THE CITY ◆

GENERAL

Meeting: 'Formulate an action plan to defeat the SIR conspiracy'; Parakala Prabhakar, Thomas Franco, Nikhil Dey to attend; Organised by Progressive Organisations; Legislators' Home-2, behind Vidhana Soudha; 10 am.

Felicitation: UPSC-CSE achievers; DK Shivakumar, Eshwar B Khandre, N Chaluvarayaswamy to attend; Organised by India for IAS; Town Hall, JC Road; 4.30 pm.

CULTURAL

Award Ceremony: 'Hamsa Samskruthika Sambhrama' and 'Hamsa Samman' award presentation; N Santosh Hegde, Srinivas G Kappanna, Srinath, Dr C Ramachandra to attend; Organised by Hamsa Jyothi Trust; Ravindra Kalakshetra, JC Road; 4.30 pm.

Woman, 28, found dead at home; family alleges 'murder staged as suicide'

BENGALURU, DHNS: A married woman was found dead in her house in Yelahanka under suspicious circumstances, police said on Sunday.

Family members found Shruthi (22) hanging from the fan on Saturday and rushed her to hospital, where she was declared dead. Police sent the body for autopsy to ascertain the actual cause of death.

Her family members staged a protest on Sunday, alleging it was "murder staged as a suicide".

They said Shruthi married Pawan Kalyan, a private employee, in December 2024 and moved in with him in Yelahanka.

Kalyan and his family had been harassing Shruthi for additional dowry. The two families had recently resolved the disputes, but the issue cropped up again.

"They told me on the phone that my sister died by suicide. I immediately informed my father. The couple was fighting earlier that day before I was told she had died. When I checked, the fan looked like it had not bent or moved. My sister weighed 75 kg," Amruth, Shruthi's younger brother, told reporters.

Yelahanka New Town police registered a case and detained Kalyan for questioning. An official statement on the arrest is awaited.

(If you are in distress or having suicidal tendencies, please reach out to this 24/7 helpline: KIRAN 1800-599-0019 or Arogya Sahayavani at 104)

Desilting, walkways part of Halasuru Lake revamp plan

BENGALURU, DHNS: Bengaluru Central City Corporation has taken up development works at Halasuru Lake to improve water storage capacity, ecological health and recreational facilities for visitors.

Corporation Commissioner Rajendra Cholan said the project includes large-scale desilting of the lake to remove sediment that has accumulated over the past 25 years.

The civic body is also constructing a two-level walkway with bund protection around the lake to create a safe and accessible path for walkers.

Desilting work progresses at Halasuru Lake as part of the civic body's restoration project to improve the lake's water storage capacity and ecological health. DH PHOTO/PRASHANTH HG

As part of the project, a connecting bridge linking the lake area to a nearby park is being built, along with a new kalyani.

The three islands located within the lake, which are in a deteriorated condition, will also be reconstructed as part of the restoration effort.

Officials said once desilting increases the depth of the water body, a portion of the lake will be suitable for training exercises by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).

"In addition, seating arrangements will be created for visitors, while the park adjoining the lake will be landscaped with various plant species to enhance the surroundings and support biodiversity," the press note stated.

E-Tender Document for auction(condemn items)

POLICE RADIO ZONE HEAD QUARTER JABALPUR, M.P.

INDIRA MARKET, MALGODAM CHOWK JABALPUR-482001
Fax No. 0761-2676123, E-mail: sprradio@mpploce.gov.in

No. SP(R)/JBP/ST/AUCTION/1082/2026 Date 09/03/2026

E-TENDER CUM AUCTION NOTICE

Invites E-Tender For Auction of Wireless Tower As Shown Below Mentioned

S. NO	ITEM NAME	QTY	OFFSET PRICE IN Rs.	REQUIRED EMD Rs.	TENDER FEES Rs.
1	100 FEET WIRLESS TOWER OLD PS DHOOMA DISTT. SEONI	01 NOS	Rs. 90000/-	Rs. 7800/-	Rs. 1000/-
2	150 FEET WIRLESS TOWER RADIO OFFICE SAGAR DISTT. SAGAR	01 NOS	Rs.171000/-		
	TOTAL OFF SET PRICE		Rs. 261000/-		

7. Cost of tender documents is Rs. 1000/- (One thousand only) which is non refundable and no Exemption in any condition. tender fees will be deposited online.
8. The tender fees and EMD should be deposited online through website. https://www.mptenders.gov.in in favour of Superintendent of Police (radio) Jabalpur m.p.
9. The tender documents can be downloaded from website https://www.mppolice.gov.in.
10. Online bid should be uploaded on website. https://www.mptenders.gov.in.
11. The bidder can bid only above the Offset Price Rs. 2,61,000/- and GST taxes are applicable as per govt. rules with GST certificate.
12. Schedule:-

A	Tender Publishing date/time	Date:- 17/03/2026 frm1700 hrs
B	Documents download/sale start date/time	Date:- 18/03/2026 frm1700 hrs
C	Online Bid Submission Start date/time	Date:- 24/03/2026 frm1700 hrs
D	Online Bid Submission End date/time	Date: 08/04/2026 till 1600 hrs
E	Bid opening date/time	Date:- 15/04/2026 1200 hrs

Sd/- Superintendent of Police (Radio) Zone Jabalpur M.P.

G-27326/25

Need a hand? Write to us

Letters of grievances are pouring in and we are doing our best to accommodate as many as possible. Readers may write in to highlight civic problems affecting their locality and we will help address them in an interactive and effective manner.

Grievances and issues related to public utility agencies such as Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) and Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (Bescom) would be highlighted in the weekly column.

The writeups, which could be accompanied by photographs highlighting the problems, will be published on Mondays. Mail your grievances to: peoplesproblems @deccanherald.co.in

Construction materials blocking sidewalks not only hinder pedestrians, but also raise dust levels.

Address construction pollution near our school

We are Class 7 students at Lawrence High School, located on 9th Main Road, Sector 6, HSR Layout.

Construction pollution around our school is becoming a serious concern due to a few new buildings being constructed nearby. Construction materials are often left on the footpath or carriageway, blocking pedestrian movement and increasing dust levels.

Students and parents waiting to pick up children are forced to navigate around debris, including heaps of sand, cement, and broken bricks. Left uncovered, these materials release fine dust that causes coughing, eye irritation, and other health issues.

Children are especially affected, as we inhale this dust while waiting outside school or playing on the grounds. Continuous exposure to such dust can lead to respiratory problems and other illnesses.

We request the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) to conduct regular inspections to ensure that construction sites near schools follow safety and pollution-control guidelines.

At a minimum, we ask that construction materials be properly covered when not in use and that water is sprayed regularly to minimise dust. This small step can make a significant difference to the health and safety of students and the community.

Vaishnavi B & Yashmitha M Gowda
Lawrence High School, HSR Layout

Resume night meals at Indira Canteens

The ongoing LPG shortage has severely affected operations at Indira Canteens, resulting in the complete suspension of night meals.

This disruption impacts workers, students, and many others who depend on these canteens for affordable and timely meals.

We request the authorities to take immediate action to address the situation, including exploring alternative energy or cooking fuel sources, so that night meals can be resumed without delay.

Comrade Chandeeswar

'Parrot astrologer' tricks IT official with ritual promise

BENGALURU, DHNS: A 59-year-old man from Tamil Nadu has been arrested for cheating an Income Tax officer of Rs 35 lakh by claiming to perform special ritual, police said on Sunday.

Shekhar, from Theni, allegedly posed as a parrot astrologer and claimed to perform a special ritual to improve the officer's life and career prospects.

Shekhar, who had his set-up near Shree Circle in Bharathinagar, approached the official while he was walking nearby. He claimed he could make predictions about the official's life by examining his face.

Once the official consented, Shekhar told him he needed to perform a special ritual to improve his life, secure promotions and advance in his career.

He later convinced the official to hand over gold and silver ornaments worth Rs 35 lakh on which the ritual would be performed.

He told the official that if he did not bring the valuables, he would face "problems in his life". He promised to return the valuables, but went absconding instead.

Police have booked the suspect under BNS sections related to cheating.

Further investigations are on.

◆ CITY WEATHER ◆

FORECAST
Mainly clear sky

TEMPERATURES
Maximum 34.0°C
Minimum 20.0°C

Rainfall	NIL
Humidity	31%
Sunset (Mar 16)	6:30 pm
Sunrise (Mar 17)	6:27 am
Moonrise	3:38 am
Moonset	3:19 pm

(Relevant data recorded at 5.30 pm) Source: IMD

Cabinet rejig likely after elections to 5 states: Ahmed

VIJAYAPURA, DHNS: Amid speculation over a possible Cabinet rejig, Chief Whip of the Congress party in the Council Saleem Ahmed on Sunday said that the exercise was likely to be undertaken after the conclusion of elections to five states.

Interacting with reporters here, Ahmed said that half the members currently serving in the Cabinet were likely to be relieved of their posts, and tasked with strengthening the party organisation. "The party seniors have been intimated about the need to induct fresh faces into the Cabinet. The party high command too has responded favourably to this idea," he added.

AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge and Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, along with the rest of the high command, will decide on a change of guard in the state, he said.

"The high command has instructed us against speaking about changing CM," Ahmed added.

Underscoring his contribution to the Congress's triumph in the 2023 elections, Ahmed added, "As the party's working president, I worked hard to ensure the party's victory. I am hopeful of a Cabinet berth."

Congress, BJP to select byelection nominees in 2-3 days

Cong won 4 bypolls since 2023; BJP looks to reverse trend

BENGALURU, DHNS:

The Congress and BJP will lock horns on April 9 in the byelections to the Davangere South and Bagalkot Assembly seats, both currently held by the Congress.

The bypolls have been necessitated by the deaths of Congress veterans H Y Meti (Bagalkot) on November 4, 2025, and Shamanur Shivashankarappa (Davangere South) on December 14, 2025.

With March 23 the last day to file nominations, both parties are expected to finalise their candidates in two to three days. The results will be announced on May 4.

The fight is expected to be bipolar, as JD(S) has negligible presence in both constituencies.

The Congress is likely to field candidates from the families of the deceased members, even though there are other contenders.

While Meti's sons Mallikarjun or Umesh is likely to get the ticket in Bagalkot, Shivashankarappa's grandson and Mining Minister S S Mallikarjun's son Samarth is being dubbed as the favourite to be the contestant in Davanagere South.

Abdul Jabbar is said to be the other probable candidate from Congress in Davangere South. Muslims form the largest bloc (over 70,000 voters) in an electorate of around 2.1 lakh, while there are around 35,000 Lingayats (Shivashankarappa was a senior Lingayat leader and All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha president at the time of his demise).

In BJP camp, two probable candidates have emerged for the Bagalkot bypoll. Veeranna Charanthimath and Pralhad Pujari — both former MLAs from the constituency — are vying for the ticket.

According to BJP sources, Charanthimath is likely to bag the ticket. In the 2023 polls, Charanthimath had offered a tight fight to Meti, losing by 5,878 votes.

Comparatively, there are more candidates in the BJP in Davangere South. The party is learnt to have trimmed the initial list of 10-12 probables to four — B G Ajay Kumar, Srinivas Das Kariappa, Raghunandan Ambarkar and Yashwanthrao Jadhav. Ajay Kumar was the runner-up in 2023, losing to Shivashankarappa by 27,888 votes.

According to BJP sources, the saffron party is expected to finalise its list by Tuesday. Bypolls traditionally tend to favour the ruling party, and the sympathy wave in favour of the veteran Congressmen is also likely to help Congress.

In fact, the Congress has won all four bypolls in the state after coming to power in 2023 (Shorapur, Channapatna, Sandur and Shiggaon), two of which — Channapatna and Shiggaon — were held by the Opposition NDA.

However, the BJP is expected to try its best to reverse the trend, especially in Bagalkot, which has witnessed several tight clashes between the two national parties over the years.

ನಂದಿನಿ
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REFRESHING SPICED BUTTER MILK
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KMF
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Social boycott: Woman kills self

VADAGERA (YADGIR DIST), DHNS: A 42-year-old woman, whose family was subjected to social boycott, allegedly ended her life by jumping into Bhima river from bridge-cum-barrage near Joladadgi in the taluk on Saturday.

The deceased is Kamalamma of Yadgir. Kamalamma, who belonged to nomadic Shillekyata community, was upset after community leaders boycotted her family as her son had an illicit affair with a woman.

Assault case: HC orders fresh probe as accused is juvenile

BENGALURU, DHNS

The High Court has ordered a fresh investigation by the Juvenile Police Unit against the petitioner, who was 17 years and 10 months old at the time of the alleged crime.

The court passed this order while partly allowing the petition challenging the FIR and chargesheet filed by Bilikere police in Hunsur taluk in Mysuru district.

The police had registered the FIR on March 18, 2023, in connection with an incident on March 17, 2023. It was alleged that the petitioner, along with others, assaulted the complainant over civil works at a disputed land. The petitioner submitted that on the relevant date of the incident, he was below 18 years of age, his date of birth being April 10, 2005.

It was further contended that the charge sheet indicates that the only offence against the petitioner is that he had caused injury by hitting the complainant on his head using a stone. Of the offences alleged against the petitioner, what can at best be pressed is an offence under IPC section 324, which is not a heinous crime, the petitioner said.

The additional public prosecutor submitted that, where it is a petty offence or a heinous offence if it is committed with adults, they are inseparable and, therefore, the rules themselves permit a child to be tried by a regular court.

Justice M Nagaprasanna noted that Rule 8 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules mandates that no FIR shall be registered against a juvenile except where the offence alleged is heinous, whether it is committed by a child solitarily or jointly with adults.

"Section 324 of the IPC, which is alleged against the petitioner, is punishable up to three years or with a fine or both. If it is punishable up to three years, it relates to a petty offence as defined under the Act, and if it is a petty offence, the police would not get jurisdiction to register the crime and investigate the matter of a juvenile. A juvenile would be an accused below the age of 18 years committing a petty offence. The crime ought to have been registered before the juvenile police or the Child Welfare Police Officer in the Special Juvenile Police Unit," Justice Nagaprasanna said.

The court directed the transfer of the entire matter to the Juvenile Police Unit for a fresh investigation and said the Juvenile Police Unit shall adhere to the procedure under the Juvenile Act and the Rules.

Setback for VISL revival as CCF bins captive mine plan in Sandur forest

BALLARI, DHNS: The attempt by the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) to have a captive mine for the Visvesvaraya Iron and Steel Limited in the Ramanamalai (Ramagad) forest block of Sandur taluk in the district, in a bid to revive the company, seems to have fallen flat.

The chief conservator of forests of the Ballari circle has rejected a proposal by SAIL for land mutation of 150 acres (60.7 hectares) of forest area for the Ramanadurga iron ore mine. Earlier, on December 1, 2025, the deputy conservator of forests of the Ballari zone had nixed VISL's proposal.

The DCF had submitted a report in this regard to the CCF and the latter has now upheld the report, thereby rejecting the proposal.

The CCF also recommended, on January 12, to the principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF-forest protection) not to receive SAIL's proposal on the captive mine for VISL.

In the report, the CCF said that the area identified for the captive mine was a virgin forest rich in biodiversity. About 29,400 trees would have to be axed to make way for the mine, thereby rendering it unfeasible, says the report.

Namma Metro Pink Line gets fourth train from BEML

BENGALURU, DHNS: Namma Metro has received the fourth train for the Pink Line whose elevated section it aims to open this May.

Coaches of the fourth Pink Line train at Kothanur depot. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The six-coach trainset arrived at the Kothanur depot, Bannerghatta Road, from BEML's New Thippasandra plant on March 13, a senior BMRCL official said. The trainset has been moved to the Inspection Bay Line (IBL) for necessary tests. The PSU rolled out the Pink Line's prototype train on December 11, 2025, and then dispatched two more trains in February.

The BMRCL is in the process of receiving statutory clearances for the prototype.

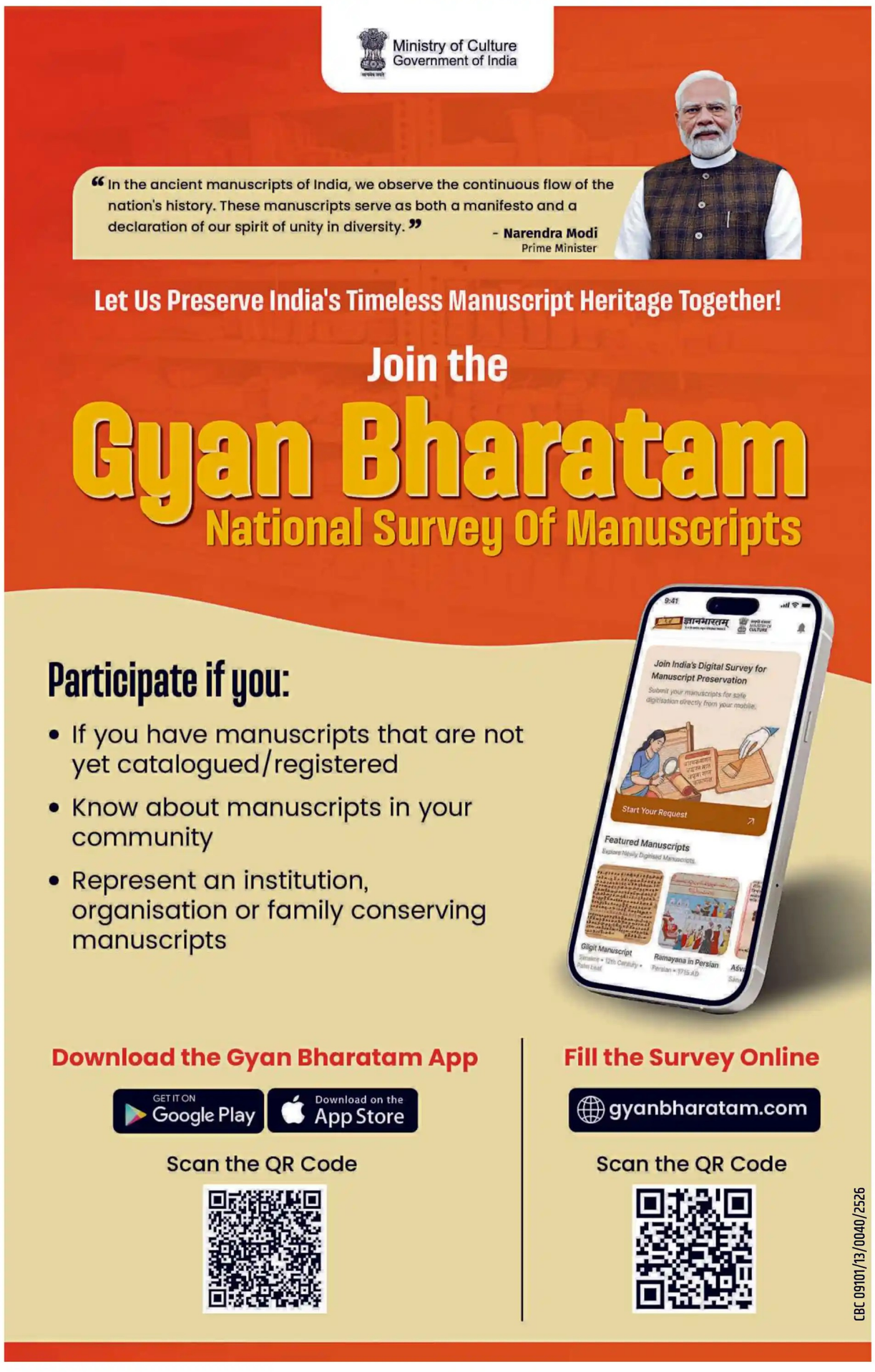
The BMRCL aims to open the 7.5-km Kalena Agrahara-Taverekere section in May.

Third DTG train

Meanwhile, Kolkata-based Titagarh Rail Systems Limited (TRSL) has dispatched a second DTG train for the Purple and Green lines.

The trainset's three coaches were dispatched on March 13 and three more the following night. The train is expected to reach the Peenya depot later this month. These two trains, along with the China-made prototype delivered in January 2025, will be inducted into the Purple and Green lines by May-June to ease peak-hour overcrowding, another senior BMRCL official said.

The Purple and Green lines currently have 57 trains.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LPG shortage leaves deep sea fishing in doldrums

MANJUSHREE G NAIK & NAINA J A
UDUPI/MANGALURU, DHNS

The shortage of commercial LPG cylinders has begun to worry fishermen along the coast of Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, as most fishing boats depend entirely on LPG for cooking while they are at sea.

WAR SHOCKS

Fishermen leader Ramesh Kunder said that the lack of commercial cylinders is already affecting fishing operations, as crews rely on them to prepare food during their trips. He told *DH* that a typical purse seine boat carries around 30 crew members and one commercial LPG cylinder usually lasts only two to three days.

"At present nearly 70% of the fishing boats have already ventured into the sea. If the shortage continues, more than 60% of these boats will be affected because cooking becomes a major challenge during long fishing trips," he said.

Kunder pointed out that fishermen cannot easily switch to firewood because it is extremely dangerous to use in a fishing boat. "We require big double-burner stoves for cooking, but most boats are completely dependent on LPG stoves. As a result, manufacturers are rarely producing large burner stoves now, and we are unable to find them in the market," he said.

He added that if such stoves were available, fishermen could at least use diesel instead of kerosene to cook food during emergencies.

Fishermen's Association president Dayanand Suvarna said that the shortage had created uncertainty among the fishing community. Former association president Krishna Suvarna said the crisis could have wider implications if fuel supply problems worsen. "If the supply of crude oil and diesel is also disrupted, fishing activities and fish exports could be severely affected. This is the season when fishermen usually get good business and better income," he said.

Suvarna added. "Earlier, kerosene stoves often caused accidents on boats. With LPG, such incidents have almost disappeared," he said.

Trawl Boat Association, Mangaluru, president Chethan Bengre said the war had also affected the export of quality fish. "As a result, fishermen are incurring loss. Without the export, we have to sell it in the open market and price may not be lucrative," he added.

1,800 villages in Karnataka consume contaminated water

Irregular testing resulting in lack of reliable data: Experts

PAVAN KUMAR H
HUBBALLI, DHNS

Nearly 1,800 villages in Karnataka continue to consume nitrate-contaminated water, while over 1,300 villages have received drinking water contaminated with fluoride and high total hardness over the past four years.

Districts such as Chitradurga, Koppal, Mandya, Vijayapura, Tumakuru, Raichur and Chikkaballapur regularly report contamination from nitrates, fluoride, total hardness, total alkalinity and other chemicals. Meanwhile, Ballari, Kalaburagi, Raichur and Chikkamagaluru frequently report bacterial contamination in drinking water sources.

Experts say irregular testing of water samples in rural areas has resulted in a lack of reliable data to address the issue. Officials attribute this to a shortage of staff in the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB), Rural Development & Panchayat Raj (RDPR) department and the Health Department, which limits their ability to collect samples from all potable water sources. The state has also not formulated a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for regular water quality monitoring.

RDPR officials claim that water testing has improved over the past three years. However, data uploaded on the Jal Jeevan Mission portal shows that the state has not reported any cases of arsenic contamination in this period. Experts and scientists, however, say villages in Raichur, Tumakuru, Kolar and Gadag have drinking water sources contaminated with arsenic.

"Iron, chloride and residual chlorine are other contaminants that are not being properly recorded in the state's monitoring system," said a KSPCB officer.

According to a written reply by the Ministry of Jal Shakti to MP G Kumar Naik, nearly 10% of water samples tested in laboratories in 2023-24 were found to be chemically or bacteriologically contaminated. In 2023-24, the state tested 2.51 lakh samples for chemical parameters and 46,309 samples for bacteriological parameters. In 2024-25, 2.72 lakh samples were tested for chemical contamination and 1.18 lakh samples for bacteriological contamination. Data shows that 6% of samples were chemically contaminated and 3% bacteriologically contaminated beyond permissible limits. Till February 2026, Karnataka tested 1.96 lakh samples for chemical parameters, of which 5.5% showed contamination, and 50,134 samples for bacteriological parameters, with 4.1% testing positive for contamination.

Experts and scientists say villages in Raichur, Tumakuru, Kolar and Gadag have drinking water sources contaminated with arsenic. DH FILE PHOTO

A senior Health Department official told *DH* that the Department of Health and Family Welfare tests drinking water sources for potability only during outbreak situations.

The official added that the absence of a comprehensive mapping of drinking water sources makes it nearly impossible to test all borewells, wells, lakes, tanks and other sources.

Hari Prasad, Senior Research Associate at WELL Labs, said that a few decades ago groundwater was considered safer than surface water. "However, today many borewells have become sources of contamination as drilling goes deeper, where the concentration of radioactive materials, heavy metals and other chemicals is higher," he said.

He also noted that many lakes in Karnataka have lost their role as primary drinking water sources due to encroachment and pollution. "Lakes are now largely treated as spaces for floodwater storage, groundwater recharge and recreation. If urgent action is not taken, both surface and groundwater could become unsafe for drinking," he warned.

RDPR Minister Priyank Kharge said the state has increased water quality testing across Karnataka. "We have been testing water samples before and after monsoon. In many cases even during the summer, we are collecting water samples to rule-out any outbreak of diseases."

"The data shows a declining trend in the proportion of contaminated samples, indicating strengthened monitoring, increased testing coverage and effective remedial measures. All non-compliant sources were immediately re-tested, and alternative safe drinking water arrangements were provided wherever required," he said.

Notification to acquire over...

Bidadi, from Page 1

Typically, it takes two to four years from issuing a preliminary notification to the final notification. Officials said the process moved faster this time as the authority relied on revenue department databases, rather than requiring farmers to produce multiple ownership records.

"We will adopt a similar approach while disbursing compensation, too, so that farmers do not have to run around submitting documents," a BMRDA official said.

The project, which has been under discussion for several years, is being positioned as a major effort to decongest Bengaluru. In March last year, the government issued a preliminary notification for 8,943 acres. Of this, around 6,300 acres is private land, while approximately 1,000 acres belong to the government, with the remaining area comprising habitation zones and lakes.

Since then, the project has drawn political opposition.

In January, Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy, said he would not allow the state government to 'illegally' acquire fertile land around Bidadi.

But Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar has defended the project and reiterated that not an inch of land will be denotified.

War hits poultry industry, egg prices...

Egg price, from Page 1

"I used to sell 10kg of chicken leg pieces every evening, but now I buy only 5kg. I've switched to a small electric stove for heating, but you can't fry chicken on that," says a street vendor.

"We stopped buying mutton entirely this week. Mutton takes much longer to cook than chicken. We've also cut our daily chicken and eggs order by 50%. Making a huge handi of biryani requires hours of high flame. Without a steady gas supply, we can't take risks and compromise on our quality," the vendor added.

With chicken meat exports also at a complete standstill and sales hit by a slowdown in the hospitality and street food sectors, the poultry sector is now looking toward government intervention or a swift resolution of tensions to prevent a total industrial collapse.

'Op Lotus at Bidadi resort; Cong Odisha...

Operation Lotus, From Page 1

When asked about these MLAs meeting AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge, the deputy CM said: "Instead of meeting our president, will our party MLAs meet BJP president? As per their wish, the MLAs have met the AICC president and obtained his blessings. They have taken a photo with him and will leave for Odisha on Monday."

As per a complaint by Orissa Congress Legislature Party's deputy leader Ashok Kumar Das, a case has been lodged against Birendra Prasad, Ajith Kumar Sahu, Simachal Mokud and Bytarayanapura's Suresh of Karnataka.

"Under Suresh's name, the accused booked rooms 401 and 402 in the resort's fourth floor and came in at night. The Odisha MLAs were all in the fifth floor," said G N Nataraj Ganakal, president of the GBDA, who is taking care of the Odisha MLAs.

"MLA Mangu (Killo) told us that the suspects had met him, showed a blank cheque and offered bribes. When we searched for them, they weren't there. Later, when we saw the CCTV footage of the resort, we got to know that four strangers had met the MLAs," he said.

3 reserve SIs die after car rams into lorry in Challakere

CHALLAKERE (CHITRADURGA DISTRICT), DHNS: Three policemen died and two more sustained injuries after the car they were travelling in rammed into a lorry near Heggere Gate in Challakere taluk, Chitradurga district in the early hours of Sunday.

The five policemen had left Bengaluru and were journeying to Ballari.

Manjunath Darimani (32), a native of Koppal was reportedly driving the car at a very high speed. Darimani, Amaresh (25) of Sindhanur in Raichur district, and Sachin (31) of Thirthahalli in Shivamogga district were instantly killed in the crash, while Eshwar and Mahantesh Bommanavar sustained severe injuries. The latter two are currently being treated at a hospital in Davanagere.

The five cops had only recently been inducted into the force. While one of them was posted to Mysuru, the remaining were stationed across Bengaluru.

Using FASTag? Pay more for...

FASTag, From Page 1

Once the payment is made, the annual pass is activated on the existing FASTag linked to the vehicle within two hours, it said.

"The annual pass gets activated within two hours on the existing FASTag linked to the vehicle after payment of the one-time fee through the Rajmarg Yatra App or the National Highways Authority of India website," it added.

The FASTag Annual Pass was launched on August 15, 2025, and has received good response from highway users, the statement said.

Iran warns against joining...

Iran, from Page 1

He said might, again, bomb targets on Iran's oil hub, Kharg Island, "just for fun".

"Iran wants to make a deal, and I don't want to make it because the terms aren't good enough yet," Trump told NBC News.

However, Araghchi said Iran was not interested in talks with the US, pushing back on Trump's stance.

"We are stable and strong enough. We are only defending our people," Araghchi told CBS's "Face The Nation," in an interview aired Sunday.

"We don't see any reason why we should talk with Americans, because we were talking with them when they decided to attack us.

"There is no good experience talking with Americans."

In another interview published on Sunday in an Arabic-language platform, Araghchi said the war pitting his country against the US and Israel will only end when Tehran can be certain it will not be restarted.

"This war will end when we are certain it will not be repeated and that reparations will be paid. We experienced this last year: Israel attacked, then the United States... they regrouped and attacked us again," Araghchi told news outlet Al-Araby Al-Jadeed, referring to Iran's war with Israel and the US in June 2025.

Meanwhile, oil from the International Energy Agency emergency reserves will begin flowing to global markets soon, with member countries pledging to make available 411.9 million barrels, the agency said in a statement on Sunday.

Governments have committed to make available 271.7 million barrels of oil from government stocks, 116.6 million barrels from obligated industry stocks and 23.6 million barrels from other sources, the statement said.

It added that 72% of planned releases are in the form of crude oil and 28% are oil products.

On the warfront, the Israeli military announced a wave of strikes against targets in western Iran, after Iran's Revolutionary Guards branded Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a criminal and vowed that they would pursue and kill him.

Bahrain and Saudi Arabia said separately on Sunday they had intercepted renewed barrages of projectiles after an AFP journalist heard warning sirens in Manama.

Late Saturday, authorities in Dubai also said air defences had made further interceptions after Iran's military warned UAE civilians to avoid port areas.

'No plaints of locals losing jobs due to migrants'

BENGALURU, DHNS: There have been no complaints of Karnataka locals facing joblessness due to migrant labourers from other states, according to the Labour Department.

Replying to an unstarred question by MLC and the chief minister's former political secretary K Govindarju, Labour Minister Santosh Lad said: "There have been no complaints of Karnataka locals facing joblessness because of migrant labourers. No such complaints have been received in either urban or rural pockets of the state."

While pointing out that there had been no survey till date regarding migrant workers in the state, Lad explained that there were 46,393 migrant workers in Karnataka as per the details obtained while seeking permission letters from the Labour Commissioner.

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2026 BATTLELINES: West Asia conflict, foreign policy challenges to shape state polls

Global headwinds spice up Assembly elections

SUMIT PANDE
NEW DELHI, DHNS

The elections to four state Assemblies and one Union Territory are being held at a time when the Narendra Modi government is facing one of its toughest foreign policy challenges. The sparks of the West Asia conflict are flying beyond the Persian Gulf, with rising crude prices and a constricted supply of cooking gas adding another variable to what would have otherwise been localised contests.

Developments in the Strait of Hormuz have disrupted livelihoods from Howrah to Haldia. In poll-bound states, non-BJP parties have been quick to seize on the issue, to pin the blame on the prime minister's foreign policy.

In West Bengal, where the BJP will make yet another attempt to unseat Mamata Banerjee from Fort William, the scramble for women's votes is intense. Over the past week, Modi has sought to frame the elections around the "insult to President Murmu" by the TMC government at an event in north Bengal.

Mamata and her colleagues, sporting black sarees, countered the BJP's charge by protesting on the streets of Kolkata against the recent hike in cooking gas prices.

Facing 15 years of anti-incumbency, the TMC will attempt to frame this election around the BJP's performance at the Centre, topping up the campaign with a thick slice of Bengali sub-nationalism.

Pressure to perform

In a country where seasonal spikes in onion prices have brought ruling parties to tears, the BJP understands all too well the political cost of war in the Persian Gulf. The long-term pains will come later, as it tries to contain the short-term impact, especially in poll-bound states. And if one is heading a coalition government at the Centre, the pressure to perform well in the states is always staring in the face.

For the BJP, ever in an election mode, every election is an opportunity to expand its own political footprint. While it faces off with regional parties in many states, its closest competitor at the national level remains the Congress. In the past decade, Modi has held the upper hand in direct contests against Rahul Gandhi.

It's a perception that the Congress has been trying to overcome, without much success, for a while now. As in Haryana and Maharashtra Assembly elections that followed the 2024 LS polls, the party has often faltered in the last lap.

Which is why Assam, of all the states in this round of polls, assumes far greater importance for the national parties. The BJP and Congress are leading their respective alliances in Assam, with the BJP leadership as invested in Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma as Rahul Gandhi is in Gaurav Gogoi.

Southern battle

For the Congress, the next high-stakes battle will be in Kerala. The elections offer an opportunity to increase its tally of serving chief ministers, reduced to a mere three now. For the Left, Kerala remains its last frontier in the country.

Tamil Nadu, the other southern state heading to the polls, remains firmly rooted in regional politics. Despite efforts and jostling, national parties have been forced to play only marginal roles.

For Chief Minister MK Stalin and Opposition leader Palaniswami, the poll outcome, however, assumes importance for another reason. The results may decide their succession plans.

In Puducherry, where the Congress-DMK alliance poses a challenge, All India NR Congress leader N Rangasamy will helm the NDA coalition, seeking his fifth term as CM.

The hurdles

- Four states, one Union Territory head to polls amid global turmoil
- In Bengal, it's BJP vs Mamata, with women's votes at the centre
- Crude price spikes and cooking gas shortages ripple into local campaigns
- In Assam, high-stakes contest between Himanta Sarma and Gaurav Gogoi
- In Tamil Nadu, regional parties dominate, succession stakes for Stalin and Palaniswami

IN KERALA, CONGRESS EYES REVIVAL, WHILE LEFT LOOKS TO DEFEND ITS LAST FRONTIER

DC and District Election Officer Ananda Kumar Das (left) with polling officials during a training session for the 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly elections, in Tezpur, Sonitpur, on Sunday. PTI

Bypolls to 8 seats in 6 states slated for April 9 and 23

SHEMIN JOY
NEW DELHI, DHNS

Bypolls to eight seats in six states, including in Karnataka's Bagalkot and Davangere South, will be held on April 9 and 23, with counting of votes slated on May 4.

The by-elections to Bagalkot and Davanegere along with Goa's Ponda, Nagaland's Koridang and Tripura's Dharmanagar, are slated for April 9. Meanwhile, the bypolls for Umreth in Gujarat and Rahuri and Baramati in Maharashtra will be held on April 23. This was announced by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar at a press conference during which Kumar also announced the schedule for Assembly elections to Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and West Bengal.

In Bagalkot

The bypoll in Bagalkot was necessitated due to the death of HY Meti, a former minister, while the death of senior Lingayat leader Shamanur Shivasankarappa at 93 years, the oldest MLA in this Assembly, forced fresh elections in Davanagere South.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has already announced that the Congress will field a family member of Meti in the Bagalkot bypoll, but the party is having a tough time choosing a candidate for Davangere South. While Shivasankarappa's family is demanding a ticket for a family member, minorities, who are sizable in the seat, want a community member to fight the bypoll.

In Ponda

The death of former Goa chief minister Ravi Naik, a BJP MLA who was earlier with Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party, necessitated the bypoll in Ponda, while the passing away of BJP MLA Imkong L Imchen representing Nagaland's Koridang and former Tripura Speaker Biswa Bandhu Sen, the BJP MLA of Tripura's Dharmanagar, necessitated fresh elections in their seats.

In Baramati

The two seats that will see bypoll in Maharashtra are Baramati, which was represented by former Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, and Rahuri, where sitting BJP MLA Shivaji Bhanudas Kardile passed away.

Gujarat will see a bypoll in Umreth, where sitting BJP MLA Govindbhai Raijibhai Parmar passed away.

We will script history in May, says Congress

NEW DELHI, PTI: After the Election Commission announced the schedule for Assembly elections to four states and a Union Territory, the Congress on Sunday said it will emerge victorious in all these states and that the BJP will face widespread rejection for its "anti-people, divisive and destructive politics".

In an X post, Congress general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal said the Congress "will script history" on May 4. "The long-awaited elections for Keralam, Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal and Puducherry have finally been announced! We are confident that we will emerge victorious in all states, and that the BJP will face widespread rejection for their anti-people, divisive and destructive politics, which have weakened India globally and brought misery to the poor and marginalised sections of India," he said.

"In Tamil Nadu, our rock-solid alliance with (Chief Minister) M K Stalin will return to power," he said.

"And undoubtedly, in my home state Keralam, the UDF is getting massive support from all sections of society and will come to power with a landslide victory of 100+ seats!" he said.

Earlier, he said the campaign period was very short. "In between, there will be Holy Week, and the election is scheduled a few days before the Vishu festival."

Kerala: CPM candidates range from CM Pinarayi to footballer

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS: From sitting MLAs, including Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, to freshers like former Indian footballer U Sharafali, the CPM in Kerala on Sunday announced 81 candidates, including six it is backing, for the Assembly polls soon after the Election Commission declared the schedule.

Pinarayi Vijayan

U Sharafali

All ministers from the CPM are among the 56 sitting MLAs seeking mandate again.

The CPI, the second-largest party in the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF), also decided to field its four incumbent ministers among its 25 candidates.

A surprise candidate from the CPM is Sharafali, fielded from Nilambur in the Malappuram district, which is a part of the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat, represented by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. The CPM could be expecting that the sportsman could influence the district's football fans. Sitting MLA Aryadan Shoukath of the Congress is most likely to seek a mandate from Nilambur again.

Meanwhile, 80-year-old Vijayan is seeking a mandate from his home constituency Dharmadam in Kannur for a third consecutive term.

He is among the many whom the party has given an exemption from its maximum-two-consecutive-terms norm.

Two-phase Bengal elections 'convenient for all': CEC

NEW DELHI, DHNS

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar on Sunday said the decision to hold the West Bengal election in two phases was made after detailed discussions, during which it was found that the reduction would be convenient to everybody.

He told reporters after announcing the poll schedules for Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Assam that the EC would take strict action if any violence or inducement was noticed or reported.

Kumar, however, did not respond to questions on the notices the Opposition submitted in Parliament for his removal, saying the EC "does not wish to engage in such dialogues" on statements made by "certain political leaders and parties" while referring to criticism of the poll body's functioning as well as on the special intensive revision (SIR) of voter rolls.

On Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's controversial statements, he said it was "not proper" for the EC to comment on remarks or decisions made before the elections were announced.

He also defended the SIR, saying it was the EC's Constitutional mandate to ensure that no eligible person was left out while no ineligible person was included in electoral rolls.

The SIR in West Bengal has been contentious, leading to the Supreme Court's intervention, which mandated that the 60 lakh-odd names listed under "adjudication" be reviewed by court-appointed judicial officers.

Asked about such cases being disposed of before the election, he said, "Learned judges are looking into it case by case. Whichever cases are approved by them shall be included in the final electoral rolls."

West Bengal Assembly polls over the years

- 2021: 8 phases
- 2016: 6 phases
- 2011: 6 phases
- 2006: 5 phases

Mamata rolls out sops hours before poll code kicks in

NEW DELHI, DHNS: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee beat the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct in the state by less than an hour to announce the long-pending payments of Dearness Allowance (DA) arrears for the state government employees.

Fifty-five minutes before the Election Commission of India's press conference in Delhi to announce poll dates, the Trinamool leader, in a post on X, said the state employees "will start receiving their ROPA (Revision of Pay Allowance) 2009 DA arrears from March 2026 onwards as per the modalities detailed out in the Notifications issued by our Finance Department".

The West Bengal state government employees have been seeking parity in DA with the central government staff. A case was initially filed in the Calcutta High Court, which ruled in favour of the employee's union.

The state government had challenged the decision in the Supreme Court.

Last month, the SC directed the state government to refix DA for its employees for the period 2008 to 2019, as per the formula laid down in the ROPA Rules.

It is estimated that the disbursement would cost the state exchequer a sum of around Rs 25,000 crore.

Honorariums

In another social media post, Banerjee also announced a Rs 500 monthly increase in honorarium for purohits and muezzins.

"With this revision, they will now receive Rs 2,000 per month. At the same time, all fresh applications that have been duly submitted by purohits and muezzins have also been approved by the State Government," the WB chief minister posted on X.

Leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, called the decisions a "classic TMC drama."

"West Bengal is watching. This time the joke is on you, Mamata Banerjee," Adhikari wrote on X.

"ROPA 2009 DA arrears "from March 2026 onwards? After years of looting the state treasury and cheating them blind, this is your desperate last-minute poll gimmick?" he said.

"Not a single paisa will actually be released. Zero accountability, zero funds, zero delivery - only empty notifications from your Finance Department to fool the People one last time," he added.

(With PTI inputs)

GYANESH KUMAR
Chief Election Commissioner

"Actions taken before the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) were a prerogative of the concerned governments. In a democratic setup, the state and central governments can take policy or other decisions they feel are appropriate. However, once the MCC comes into force, any decision that affects the outcome of the election or works as an inducement is not allowed. The MCC has come into force just now.

Triangular fight brews in Kerala as BJP gains ground

ARJUN RAGHUNATH
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, DHNS

As Kerala heads to the Assembly polls on April 9, the state's traditionally bipolar contest between the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) and the CPM-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) faces a new dynamic, with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) emerging as a key force.

Amid the closely fought battle between the LDF and UDF, the possibility of the NDA playing a decisive role cannot be ruled out, as the saffron party has steadily improved its performance in successive elections in a few of Kerala's 140 seats.

While the UDF is making an all-out effort to return to power after 10 years, the LDF is seeking a hat trick by showcasing its achievements. For the CPM, the stakes are especially high, as Kerala remains the only state where the party is currently in power.

Traditionally, Kerala's political trend has seen the UDF and LDF alternating in power every five years. However, in the 2021 Assembly polls, the LDF broke this pattern by winning a second consecutive term, aided by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's leadership and internal fights within the Congress.

Vijayan continues to be the undisputed leader of the LDF this time as well, while the UDF struggles under a top-heavy leadership structure, with Opposition Leader VD Satheesan, his predecessor Ramesh Chennithala and AICC General Secretary KC Venugopal at the helm.

Even though technocrat-turned-politician Rajeev Chandrasekhar managed to gain control of BJP Kerala within a year of his appointment as state president, the party's election icon remains Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Chandrasekhar himself will take on the challenge of reclaiming BJP's maiden seat in the state, Nemom in Thiruvananthapuram, which the party won in 2016 but lost in 2021.

POLL-READY

- Kerala Assembly polls on April 9
- State has 140 Assembly seats
- After SIR, total number of voters stands at 2.69 cr
- Sabarimala women's entry issue and gold heist to dominate campaign

Sabarimala issue

The LDF government has mounted an extensive public relations campaign, even roping in celebrities like actor Mohanlal, to showcase its welfare initiatives and counter the anti-incumbency sentiment that was evident in the recent local body polls.

Meanwhile, both the UDF and NDA are trying to cash in on the controversies surrounding the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple women's entry issue and the temple gold heist.

The LDF is on the defensive after earlier taking a progressive stand in support of lifting the ban on women aged 10-50 from entering the hill shrine. It has now made a U-turn, maintaining that beliefs and customs must be protected.

Meanwhile, a few CPM leaders were arrested in connection with the temple gold heist.

Stalin, Palaniswami, or Vijay: Who will claim Tamil Nadu throne?

E T B SIVAPRIYAN
CHENNAI, DHNS

Palaniswami

M K Stalin

TVK leader Vijay

The ruling DMK is sweating it out to script history by returning to power for a second consecutive term, while the AIADMK—the principal opposition—is working hard to regain its lost glory.

Meanwhile, the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK)—the new political venture in the town—is hoping for a miracle.

This time, the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections are nothing short of a political potboiler, as about 5.67 crore eligible voters will decide in favour of either the two dominant forces—the DMK and the AIADMK—or pave the way for the emergence of a third force in the TVK, which has already disrupted the political landscape.

Vijay is undoubtedly the X-factor, with several theories on whom his fledgling party could hurt more: the DMK or the AIADMK. Since the actor has projected himself as the prime challenger to the ruling DMK, he might be expected to harvest a chunk of the anti-incumbency votes.

He is being taken seriously: Many pre-poll and internal surveys commissioned by parties have placed the TVK's vote share at 15-20%. Besides youths, he is also expected to corner a chunk of the votes from minorities and Dalits, who have voted heavily for the DMK-led alliance since 2019.

However, his biggest challenge could come on the ground: The TVK does not have the infrastructure to take on the Dravidian parties' well-oiled election machinery.

For CM and DMK chief M K Stalin, the election is more than an acid test. He believes his government's "good work" in the past five years has positioned the DMK to win a second consecutive term for the first time since 1971. However, the DMK is under criticism for not fulfilling promises made ahead of the 2021 polls, with several sections, including government servants, hitting the streets in the last few months.

For the AIADMK and its general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami, this is a make-or-break election. The 53-year-old party is working against all odds to end its losing streak and reinforce its dominance in the state.

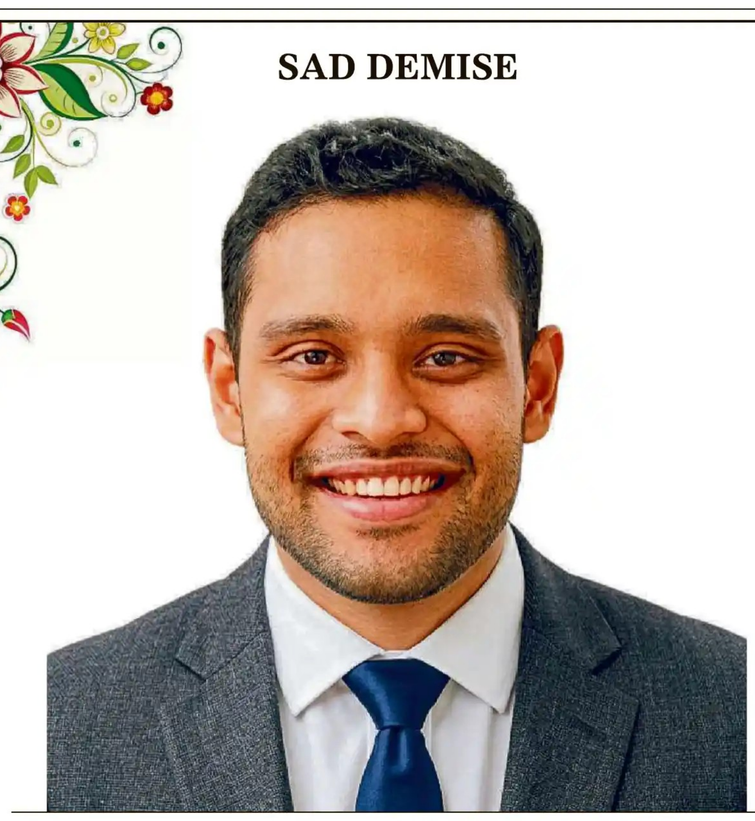
TN Assembly elections at a glance

- 5.67 crore Total voters
- 7,617 Transgender voters
- 2.89 cr Female
- 2.77 cr Male

VOTER BREAK-UP

- 12.5 lakh First-time voters
- 1.05 crore Between 20-29 years
- 4.63 lakh PwDs
- 2,530 Centenarians
- 4 lakh Very senior citizens (Above 85 years)

SAD DEMISE



Nikhil Sunil Elias

We regret to inform you of the demise of Nikhil Sunil Elias on March 11, 2026.

"The flame that burns twice as bright burns half as long."

Nikhil was a loving brother, a loyal friend and a wonderful son. His spirit will live on through those who had the privilege to meet him.

Scan here for Funeral details

Deeply missed by family and friends

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Impeachment move shows deep distrust

The Opposition plan to move an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanendra Kumar is unprecedented in the country's parliamentary history. The Trinamool Congress (TMC) and I.N.D.I.A bloc parties submitted a formal notice for the motion, following weeks of deliberation. It is for the first time that a CEC has faced an impeachment motion and that shows how deep the distrust is. The TMC took the initiative, and other parties, which have equally strong complaints against the CEC, joined the move. The immediate trigger is the way the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is being conducted in West Bengal. Assembly elections are due in the state very soon and the TMC strongly believes that the process is loaded against the party through large-scale omission of voters and other manipulations.

The SIR process has been criticised in other states also. The criticism is not without basis and the Supreme Court has intervened in the process in various ways. The main complaint against the CEC is that his functioning has been "partisan and discriminatory" to favour the BJP. The conduct of a Constitutional functionary should be above board and even-handed, but the CEC has been found wanting on many occasions. It is not just the SIR process that has been adversarial. His responses to complaints about vote *chori*, raised by Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, and the violation of the model code of conduct by the BJP and members of the government including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have been seen as partisan. The drawing up of election schedules and decisions on Opposition requests on election-rated matters have also come across as being unfair.

With his actions, CEC Gyanendra Kumar has triggered a crisis of confidence

There is merit in the complaints of the Opposition parties. The CEC has not been responsive to their complaints. He was sometimes seen as being hostile in his public postures and statements. The Election Commission is the most important Constitutional office in an electoral democracy and has the responsibility to conduct elections fairly and freely. The motion for the removal of the CEC is the harshest measure possible against the incumbent of the high office. It is unfortunate that it is being wielded now—it shows the absolute breakdown of relations between the Opposition and the CEC. The move comes in the wake of the no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, and is also bound to fail as in the case of the Speaker. But it serves to draw attention to the decline of the two Constitutional offices vital for the functioning of parliamentary democracy.

Good call to revisit data centre policy

Karnataka's decision to revisit its data centre policy is both timely and prudent. As the digital economy expands at breakneck speed, governments worldwide are grappling with the environmental costs of the infrastructure that powers it. By reviewing a policy that is barely a few years old, IT and BT Minister Priyank Kharge has acknowledged a fundamental reality: technological progress cannot come at the expense of ecological sustainability. Bengaluru is celebrated as India's information technology capital, the city where software innovation flourished and the digital services economy took root. Yet, the next phase of the digital revolution—driven by artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and big data—depends not merely on human talent but also on vast physical infrastructure. Data centres require enormous tracts of land, uninterrupted electricity, and, above all, large quantities of water for cooling. In a city already struggling with water scarcity and strained infrastructure, the unchecked expansion of such facilities risks deepening an unsustainable situation.

Data centres operate round the clock, housing thousands of servers that generate intense heat. To prevent system failure, massive cooling systems must run continuously, often consuming nearly as much electricity as the computing equipment itself. Water, meanwhile, is widely used in cooling towers to regulate temperature. Even a modest facility can consume millions of litres of water annually. In a city where water must be pumped from the Cauvery over long distances—and where legal caps limit the volume that can be drawn—such consumption inevitably raises uncomfortable questions about priorities.

Karnataka can consider moving the water-intensive sector to coastal districts

However, the dilemma cannot be resolved simply by opposing data centres. They have become an indispensable component of the modern economy. Every digital payment, video stream, cloud service or artificial intelligence query relies on servers housed in these facilities. They support innovation, enable businesses to operate globally, and form the backbone of emerging technologies that will shape the future. In that sense, they are indeed a "necessary evil", essential to economic progress but demanding careful management of their environmental footprint. The state government's move to reconsider the location and regulatory framework for data centres, therefore, deserves support. Encouraging such facilities to develop in regions with better access to water and connectivity, particularly coastal areas, could ease the burden on Bengaluru while still allowing Karnataka to remain a major digital hub. It would also place data centres closer to international subsea cable landing stations, providing the high-speed global connectivity that landlocked Bengaluru cannot offer. The challenge ahead is to strike a delicate balance: embracing the opportunities of the data-driven economy while ensuring that the infrastructure powering it does not exhaust the very resources on which cities depend.

YOUNG AND RESTLESS

Gen Z and regime change

Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal have witnessed a generational shift in political participation

SANJAY K BHARDWAJ

Procedurally, India has become the largest functional democracy in the world, whereas its neighbours have been struggling with it. Though all the neighbouring countries have common civilisational and democratic legacies, they still are witnessing an interface between domestic politico-economic crises along with external geopolitical competition for regime change.

In fact, with the disappearance of the 'colonial masters', these neighbours have plunged into a vortex of either military dictatorships, religious resurgence or ethnic backlash.

This happened primarily because of the erosion of the anti-colonial nationalistic hegemony and the crisis of legitimacy that followed was tackled either by primordial appeals to religion and ethnicity, by resorting to discipline and repression of military dispensations, or often by the above factors working in conjunction.

However, recent trends reflect generational shifts in political participation, particularly in smaller countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.

These countries have recently experienced regime change through protests, military intervention or constitutional-electoral processes. Though Pakistan has a top-down approach, where the military has a significant influence over civilian governments, the removal of prime minister Imran Khan through a parliamentary no-confidence motion in 2022 marked a significant political shift.

His government was replaced by a coalition of two rival political parties of Pakistan: the Pakistan Peoples Party of Bhutto and the Pakistan Muslim League (N) of Sharif. This coalition— consecrated by Army chief Asim Munir, now Field Marshal, and the Americans—has been led by Shehbaz Sharif.

In fact, the ruling coalition in Pakistan had collaborated with the US, hoping to deal with the economic crisis, inflation and IMF dependency on the one hand and overpower the voices of the youth, mobilised strongly through social media campaigns supporting Imran, on the other. The US was also uneasy with Imran, who had been closely working with Russia and China during his term as the prime minister.

Political churn

Unlike Pakistan, other neighbours have witnessed a bottom-up (people's coup) approach in regime change. However, domestic politico-economic crises and the role of external powers reflect the same trend.

These neighbours have faced popular uprising by determined youths and Gen Z. Sri Lanka experienced a dramatic regime change due to economic collapse.

Nationwide protests known as 'Aragalaya' transformed into political crises, leading to the resignation of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. This resulted in the rise of Ranil Wickremesinghe as president through parliamentary elections. Sri Lanka's crisis produced a parliamentary transition through constitutional means, where the youth demanded systemic political reforms and anti-corruption measures, which finally

paved the way for the election of Anura Kumara Dissanayake as president.

The Monsoon Revolution in Dhaka took a sharp turn on August 5, 2024, when then prime minister Sheikh Hasina hurriedly left the country for a safe abode.

Her ouster from power may have calmed down the protesters as it addressed the core demands of the "Students Against Discrimination". Against Hasina's government, there were grievances over employment opportunities due to the quota policy, corruption, nepotism and authoritarianism.

Nevertheless, the kind of acts committed by the protesters post-Hasina's ouster indicate that the movement was not just an outburst of students' frustration against a specific policy but was a deliberate and organised attempt, particularly by the radical forces, to re-instate the ideology of Old Muslim Leaguers, the adherents of 1947 (Islam as core), against the spirit of 1971 (Bengali culture as core).

The Jamaat-e-Islami once again collaborated with Pakistan and the US for their politico-strategic motives. The Americans allegedly wanted to have a naval base on St. Martin Island in the Bay of Bengal to minimise Chinese presence in the region, a request Hasina denied.

After Hasina, the interim government was meant to restore neutrality and prepare the ground for elections, but Muhammad Yunus was disproportionately influenced by Jamaat.

After 18 months, the country finally witnessed the 13th Jatiya Sansad elections, which were criticised for excluding the Awami League from the electoral process. The winner — Bangladesh Nationalist Party under Tarique Rahman — may have the potential to reintroduce stability, but it does not translate into inclusive democracy.

After the September 2025 Gen Z movement in Nepal, the results of the subsequent parliamentary elections of March 5, 2026, have marked a revolutionary change. After the first "revolution" against the monarchy in 2006, the country had Constituent Assembly elections in 2008.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal's Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) had received similar enthusiastic support from the people. However, it failed to live up to public expectations and couldn't provide an inclusive constitution. Democracy did not firmly take root, political and economic equality could not materialise and a stable government was not provided.

After 10 years of the new constitution of 2015, the youth-led protests and anti-government demonstrations led the second "revolution" in the form of the Gen Z movement. The subsequent fall of the K P Sharma Oli government and the fresh elections on March 5, won massive support for the newly formed Rastriya Swatantra Party under the young leadership of Balendra (Balen) Shah. By giving a call against corruption, nepotism, authoritarianism, Balen has successfully mobilised Gen Z in his favour.

The main triggers for the Gen Z movement was the Oli government's decision to ban 26 social media platforms and the use of force to suppress the protesters.

The traditional parties were in deep crisis over issues such as political instability (frequent government changes), unemployment and, consequently, mass youth out-migration.

The ban on social media (mostly owned by the West) and Oli's perceived proximity to China annoyed the US. Nepal witnessed a classical generational shift while Sri Lanka displayed institutional strength. Bangladesh couldn't come out of traditional patterns. Hence, the change of guard in the neighbourhood reflects a complex interplay of domestic dynamics and geopolitical competition between extra-regional powers.

While some transitions occur through elections, others emerge from popular uprisings or institutional crises or the influence of social media. The growing political participation of Gen Z represents a transformative force shaping the region's democratic future.

For India, promoting liberal democratic values and economic cooperation with its neighbours will be crucial to ensure regional stability.

(The writer is a professor at the School of International Studies, JNU)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

A taste for culinary knowledge

Food shapes one's state of being

SHAKUNTALA MANAY N

Recalling a casual conversation in the Food and Nutrition Laboratory with a colleague, I once said, "How wonderful it would be to document the recipes of our grandmothers, who prepare dishes so precisely and perfectly that the results are flawless."

This dream stayed with me when I went to Southern Illinois University for my master's degree. That aspiration led me to take courses in food science, and my dissertation became a practical realisation of that dream.

The manual I developed guided students step by step, from instructions to the final preparation. When principles and practices were followed carefully, the resulting dish matched what was expected. Over time, this became a long journey of collecting knowledge and explaining the science behind preparation. The text described the principles, while the exercises focused on producing the dish itself. The final experience was to see and savour the product thus created.

The material was methodically arranged according to food groups. The chapters were aligned to explain what food and nutrition are and how they are inter-related. Foods were classified beginning with beverages, fruits, vegetables, cereals and cereal products, pulses, nuts, oils and fats, milk and milk products, eggs and meat products. Each food was examined from the raw stage to the finished product, covering preparation, preservation, and methods to maintain quality.

The chapters moved logically from cereals, fruits and vegetables to food chemistry, quality, processing and nutrition in relation to health. This progression was meant to prepare the mind to appreciate what I call "food consciousness".

In this process, I discovered a wealth of knowledge embedded in our culture, practices we often follow without realising their deeper meaning. Traditional Indian thought distinguishes foods according to the psychological effects they create. The concepts of *sattvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic* foods reflect how the culture of food influences not only the body but also the mind and mood. Food, therefore, is not merely to appease hunger; it shapes one's state of being.

Recent studies, too, point to the relationship between diet and psychological well-being, an idea that those pursuing personal growth find deeply meaningful.

On February 26, a memorable moment in my life arrived when my book, Food Facts and Principles, was officially released at the University of Mysore during a conference on home science. The book was released by Vice-Chancellor N K Loknath in the presence of Shivarathri Deshikendra Swami of Suttur Mutt and other dignitaries.

For me, the occasion carried special meaning. In 1962, my father, N A Nikkam, had served as vice-chancellor. The presence of Shivarathri Deshikendra Swami added a spiritual grace to the event, especially when he recalled meeting my father years ago.

These experiences remain cherished memories and a treasure for the rest of my life. Seeing many of my former students at the conference was, in a sense, the proof of the pudding for the book.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Make Opposition opinion carry more weight

It is unprecedented in the history of Independent India that all opposition parties have joined together to seek removal of Om Birla as Lok Sabha Speaker and Gyanesh Kumar as Chief Election Commissioner for their partisan attitude favouring the ruling BJP dispensation, trampling over constitutional tenets. Though it is apparent that these officials have become subservient to the ruling party, the no-confidence motion was defeated due to lack of a two-thirds majority. The motion against the CEC will likely meet the same fate. The opposition's reasons for removal are genuine. Perhaps amending the Constitution to reduce the quorum for impeachment could be a solution, preventing abuse of power.
Tharcius S Fernando, Chennai

Protect regional ethos

I refer to 'Kerala govt maintains 2007 stand on women's entry at Sabarimala' (Mar 15). Religion is a matter of faith, shaped by customs and traditions evolved over centuries. The Sabarimala temple's restrictions on women of certain ages are not unique to Hinduism; similar practices exist worldwide. In a pluralistic India, believers' faith and practices must be considered. Temple rituals and modes of worship vary widely, reflecting regional ethos. While equality is important, sentiments and practices sustaining communities deserve respect.
H N Ramakrishna, Bengaluru

Unanswered questions

The narrative about the country-wide gas shortage does not add up. The Union petroleum minister stated that there is enough stock. Since gas is filled into cylinders by public sector companies, was it deliberately delayed or withheld? Why were domestic cylinder costs raised?
Hemachandra Basappa, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: **letters@deccanherald.co.in** (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

Kerala will vote for the BJP and bring the party to power... people want the Modi model of development and the development that has been denied to them for the last 75 years by the LDF and the UDF.

Prakash Javadekar, senior BJP leader

Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.

Warren Buffet

TO BE PRECISE

IN PERSPECTIVE

Kerala's unfolding migrant story

Rising attacks on Bengali workers in the state expose how suspicion and slurs bleed into violence

SURAJ GOGOI

Ramanarayan Baghel, a migrant worker from Chhattisgarh, was lynched on December 17 last year in the Attappallam area of Walayar, Palakkad district, Kerala. In his post-mortem report, on a body only 31 years old, at least 80 separate wounds were identified. To inflict such violence requires a chilling degree of intent; it is no ordinary crime, and neither is such a crime limited to the assailants alone. One must contextualise the event to shed light on the larger social picture.

Apart from suspecting him of theft, the mob also asked if he was a 'Bangladeshi', a term not so commonplace in Kerala, where 'Bengali' is more familiar. Who, then, has imported this abusive slur into the state? One must also ask: what perceptions of migrant workers, particularly the 'Bengali', are held in contemporary Kerala? A Bengali migrant worker, as 'Bangladeshi', is an unfortunate political gift of Assam to Bharat. It travelled through Assam's anti-migrant protests of the 20th century, culminating in the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which sharpened the distinction between native and foreigner. Anxieties about the presence of foreigners found expression in law, granting exceptional protection to the native and instituting elaborate legal processes to identify foreigners. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) follows in its footsteps in many ways. This fixation with identity comes with a desire to control migrant bodies, which more often than not end up in surveillance and, at times, violence against them. The turn to nativity cards in Kerala must be contextualised within the changing landscapes of social perceptions of migrant workers.

One such shifting social ground is the treatment of migrant children. Interactions with some parents of Bengali ethnicity reveal that children increasingly report being "taunted" even by teachers in schools for being Bengali. They appear as jokes or in the name of friendly banter. Such taunts also ought to be contextualised. At times, boundaries are crossed, such as suggesting that migrant workers are taking away jobs of local people in Kerala. These anti-immigrant tropes have been recorded globally. Bengali migrant workers are also profiled as dirty, unhygienic and poor. This is precisely what xenophobia looks like. Xenophobia is xenophobia; it would be a mistake to categorise them as 'hard' and 'soft' forms. Social prejudice against migrant workers is also evident in their identification along ethnic lines — as 'Bengali' rather than through religion or other registers. This was precisely the template of 'Bangladeshi' in Assam, where ethnicity/language mattered, not religion. A Hindu Bengali is also seen as a Bangladeshi.

It must be acknowledged that the assailants of Ramanarayan Baghel were charged, and his lynching was condemned by the state government and civil society in Kerala. Yet something is shifting socially. Anti-immigrant sentiment is no longer rare. It has become palpable, emergent. The recent attacks on migrant workers in Perumbavoor in Kochi are a case in point—showing how dark forces gather quickly. Even for petty crimes, migrants often become soft targets. It begins there and escalates into slogans of "go back".

To borrow from Georg Simmel, migrant workers are, like the stranger, those who have not overcome the freedom of coming and going. This unfreedom is exacerbated by random acts of violence against them.

Hearing the stories of migrant workers like Ramanarayan Baghel reminds one of the story of Kader Mia that Amartya Sen recounts in *Development as Freedom.* Kader Mia had come out of his home, in desperation and despite his wife's pleas not to, in riot-gripped pre-partition Dhaka, to find work so he could feed his family. On his way to work, he was knifed in the back and later succumbed to his injuries. Sen writes, reflecting on this story, that "the penalty of his economic unfreedom turned out to be his death... Economic unfreedom can breed social unfreedom, just as social and political unfreedom can also foster economic unfreedom."

Ramanarayan's fate was no different. Last year, similar attacks on Bengali migrant workers were reported from across the country, driven by misplaced suspicion of them being 'Bangladeshis'. Suspicion, as philosophers have argued, is often the search for an enemy. When you want to find one, the finger will be pointed at someone, who may be deleted, unmapped, ridiculed, or lynched, and with absolute impunity for the person pointing the finger.

Suspicion, social surveillance by vigilante individuals and groups, the counting of citizens, and identification drives by modern states often end up in violence. It has torn apart societies at the very least. Will the story be any different for Kerala?

(The writer teaches at the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode)

Snakebite is not just a health issue. Karnataka shows why

SUMANTH BINDUMADHAV AND SHUBHRA SOTIE

Snakebites claim over 58,000 lives in India each year, with many more survivors facing lifelong disabilities such as amputations and organ damage. The victims are overwhelmingly rural: farmers walking barefoot at dawn, plantation workers harvesting crops, day-wage labourers sleeping on floors, and children playing around their homes.

Fear-driven retaliation leads to the routine killing of snakes, often even when they pose no immediate threat. Ironically, this can be counterproductive: many snakes killed are harmless, and their removal can create ecological vacancies that may later be occupied by venomous species.

Coexistence with snakes is often discussed as an ethical or ecological goal, but it is only possible when communities feel medically secure. A farmer is far more likely to tolerate a cobra in a field if they know treatment is accessible, affordable, and effective. Snakebite disproportionately affects working-age adults, and when a breadwinner dies or loses mobility, entire households can fall into poverty. Strengthening health systems is therefore the foundation of any meaningful coexistence strategy.

While the volume of conflict with elephants or tigers pales in comparison to that of conflict with snakes, the matter receives only a fraction of attention. The tide began to turn when, in 2019, the World Health Organisation re-recognised snakebite as a neglected tropical disease (NTD), spotlighting its toll on the poor. India's National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) responded by launching the National Action Plan for Snakebite Envenoming (NAPSE) in March 2024 as a blueprint for states and central agencies, with guidance that emphasises surveillance, prevention, and management and shares the WHO's goal to halve deaths by 2030.

Karnataka has moved quickly to translate this momentum into policy. In February 2024, the state declared snakebite a notifiable disease under the Karnataka Epidemic Diseases Act, requiring real-time reporting through the Integrated Health Information Portal (IHIP).

Surveillance is the backbone of effective policy. Reliable data allows authorities to identify high-risk districts, strategic positioning of antivenom stocks, and target awareness campaigns. Karnataka's policy triggered a surge in reporting – from 3,439 cases in 2022 and 6,596 in 2023 to 13,235 in 2024 and 16,805 in 2025. The rise reflects improved reporting rather than an increase in snakebites. In January, free treatment in government and empanelled private hospitals was mandated, eliminating upfront costs via state health insurance integration.

Building on these reforms, Karnataka launched its State Action Plan for Snakebite Envenoming (SAPSE) in February 2026. The plan shifts the response from purely medical treatment to coordinated, multi-sector governance.

While snakebite is a public health concern on the outside, it is a multifaceted crisis that transcends hospital wards, and this plan exemplifies coordinated, multidisciplinary action. For instance, prevention of snakebites requires the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj departments to work with communities on sanitation and waste management to control rodent populations. Moreover, it needs the Department of Agriculture to work with farmers and its own officers on ensuring farmer safety through education, and it needs the forest department to ensure there are robust conflict resolution mechanisms in place for those who need it.

SAPSE is a way of organising data into three pillars with rules that must be followed. First, surveillance mandates district-level dashboards and annual audits, rooting policies in real-time evidence over anecdote. Second, prevention directs agriculture and rural development departments to integrate snake-safe protocols into their outreach, curbing encounters through community training, and lastly, management ensures anti-venom availability, upskilling ASHA workers, and referral pathways directly increase survival rates.

SAPSE also highlights research gaps such as regional antivenom trials. While current treatment protocols focus on the "Big Four" species – the spectacled cobra, Russell's viper, saw-scaled viper, and common krait – the plan also recognises other medically significant species in Karnataka.

The action plan boldly confronts legislative gaps, advocating uniform compensation for snakebite victims akin to other occupational hazards, ensuring families receive timely financial relief without bureaucratic hurdles. It pushes to restrict harmful therapies while streamlining legal frameworks for ethical venom collection to bolster regional antivenoms. These reforms, from victim support under labour laws to antivenom quality regulations, demand Centre-state alignment transforming SAPSE from a state action plan to a national example and shielding Karnataka's rural workforce from economic ruin.

SAPSE's inter-departmental approach fosters accountability with defined timelines, transcending individual leadership to ensure continuity across changing administrations. Crucially, it institutionalises evidence-based messaging, countering misinformation and harmful first-aid myths with uniform awareness. Heralding snakebite as a multifaceted issue demanding stakeholders' constructive collaboration marks a landmark transition from crisis management to a coordinated, multidisciplinary mission to save lives and livelihoods.

Karnataka has shifted the narrative. Snakebites are not an inevitable part of rural life but rather a solvable public health problem, with positive outcomes for communities and snakes alike. If India is to meet the WHO goal of halving global snakebite deaths by 2030, other states must follow suit.

(Sumanth is director of the wildlife department, and Shubhra is a senior specialist of wildlife research at Humane World for Animals India)

The Giving Pledge, once trendy among the world's richest, has come upon hard times

The billionaire backlash against a philanthropic dream

THEODORE SCHLEIFER

Brian Armstrong, chief executive of Coinbase, was the first to voluntarily un-sign the Giving Pledge. THE NEW YORK TIMES

Just a few months after Warren Buffett convened a series of high-end dinners across America to collect signatures for something called the Giving Pledge, he was feeling optimistic about his new idea for philanthropy. Seated in May 2010 at Charlie Rose's table next to his partners in the effort, Melinda French Gates and her husband, Bill, Buffett foresaw something revolutionary. "We're talking trillions over time," Buffett said. "You hope to establish a new norm."

One by one, the world's richest people would be persuaded to commit more than half of their money to nonprofit causes. "In just a few short months we've made good progress," Buffett said that December, as 17 more families joined in.

A week later, Buffett and the Gateses made their first of two visits with President Barack Obama to talk about the pledge in the Oval Office. They were back to the White House seven months later, when Obama lavished praise on the pledge in a 30-minute session with a few dozen signers, according to a person in the room.

In those heady times, it was unmistakably fashionable to sign the Giving Pledge. The project was born in an era when people including Gates epitomised a humanitarian culture that espoused both big capitalism and big philanthropy. Being seen as a good billionaire who gave back was important. Republicans and Democrats a like embraced the Gates Foundation's priorities — US education, global health and gender equality. Now, it's stylish, in a Silicon Valley contrarian sort of way, to bash the Giving Pledge.

Over the past two years, there has been a growing backlash from the billionaires who are its target donors. One of its first signers suggested he was "amending" his pledge to account for his for-profit ventures. Another signed it, and then in an occurrence without precedent, unsigned it.

No Oval Office visits anymore: President Donald Trump's team describes the Pledge as almost a punchline. There's even a quiet campaign by one pro-Trump tech billionaire to destroy it. Instead of signing up for nonpartisan philanthropy, some billionaires seeking impact are looking for a more direct route, spending more than ever on American elections.

The zeitgeist has changed very fast.

Aaron Horvath, a sociologist who has studied the Giving Pledge, called it a "time capsule" of that 2010 era. "It feels old school," he said. Billionaires, he said, now think: "I can keep my head down and keep making money. I don't have to put up with this charity charade anymore."

This is an era of a more voracious capitalism, of billionaires trending right and getting ahead by embracing an administration that is happy to dole out favours. Many of today's ascendant billionaires are dismissive of philanthropy as nothing more than public relations.

In this worldview, the real way to give back is via business success, to the redound of the US economy. Elon Musk, the world's wealthiest person, has said that his businesses "are philanthropy."

And that's all to say nothing of how the public perception of one of the pledge's figureheads, Bill Gates, has blown up over his ties to Jeffrey Epstein. That scandal led to his divorce from Melinda French Gates in 2021 and her ultimate exit from the foundation, which administers the pledge, in 2024. The Gates Foundation itself, meanwhile, is out of season in politics. Its causes, such as global health, have been attacked mercilessly by the Trump administration.

Peter Thiel, a tech billionaire and a frequent Gates critic, said in an interview that he had privately encouraged about a dozen Giving Pledge signers to undo it. "Most of the ones I've talked to have at least expressed regret about signing it," he said. He has his own Epstein ties, but he calls the pledge an "Epstein-adjacent, fake Boomer club."

John Arnold, a Houston billionaire who made money as an energy trader and was one of the earliest signers, said that what looks like tough times for the pledge are really just tough times for nonprofits.

"There was a backlash against a lot of charitable giving," he said. "And the pledge kind of got swept up in that because it became synonymous with billionaire giving."

The Giving Pledge did, as Buffett hoped, indeed establish something of a new "norm" in philanthropy. More than 250 families signed it, including those of Mike Bloomberg, Sam Altman and MacKenzie Scott. The pledge became a way for the uber-wealthy to announce they'd arrived.

Scott signed it in 2019, after her split from Jeff Bezos. A year later she began her enormous, rapid-fire philanthropic giving. Arnold is another of its most successful stories. *Forbes* estimated that he and his wife, Laura, have given away more than 40% of their networth to charity, almost all since signing it — and they're only in their early 50s.

"In its early years, the Giving Pledge helped build norms where few existed," said Taryn Jensen, who now runs the pledge. "Our goal is to keep building a culture where giving is the norm and to provide the support that helps turn commitment into action."

But the rate of signers has plummeted in recent years. In the pledge's first five years 113 people signed; 72 in the next five years; and just 43 in the next five, including a mere four signers in 2024. Last year was a relatively successful year by recent standards, with 14 signers, including Craig Newmark of Craigslist and Drew Houston of Dropbox.

"The value proposition has changed because the erosion of general trust, the polarisation of everything over the last years," said Tom Tierney, who advises wealthy donors at Bridgespan, one of the nonprofit sector's blue-chip advisory firms, and is on the board of the Gates Foundation. "You're more likely to be criticised for giving large amounts of money away now than praised. That probably wasn't as true 15 years ago," he said, citing "contention" around extreme wealth.

Research published last summer by left-wing critics of the pledge argued that very few signers were actually giving away their money at a fast enough rate to drive down their net worth. Most philanthropic donations went to intermediary organisations, they said, such as their own foundations, or happened *en masse* after they died, which technically satisfies the pledge.

Jensen said many signers "have already met their commitments or are steadily working towards them."

Still, for someone on the right such as Thiel, there is a symbolic point to be made in his campaign against the pledge.

"They got an incredible number of people to sign up those first four or five years, and it somehow has really run out of energy," Thiel said, positing that some of the people who sign it now aren't even billionaires. (The pledge says it is open to those whose net worth is under $1 billion but "plan to give away at least $500 million and are in a position to do so.") "I don't know if the branding is outright negative, but it feels way less important for people to join."

Ron Conway, a venture capitalist signer who is close to Bill Gates, said comments like Thiel's made little sense to him. Conway, who is active in Democratic politics, said the Giving Pledge had plenty of conservatives and moderates.

"Some people say that the Giving Pledge is aligned with liberal causes, or is woke, so to speak, and that couldn't be the further from the truth," he said.

Not all billionaires have turned away from giving, of course. "It is sad to me that many wealthy individuals (especially in the tech industry) have recently adopted a cynical and nihilistic attitude that philanthropy is inevitably fraudulent or useless," wrote Dario Amodei, a co-founder of Anthropic, in a January essay. And yet, befitting the times, even Amodei, 43, hasn't signed the pledge himself. Anthropic has ties to the so-called effective altruist movement, which prioritises charity but is also far more concerned than the Giving Pledge is with whether that charity is effective.

Melinda French Gates recently presented the pledge's success as somewhat qualified. She told *Wired* in December, "I wish we had been even more successful with the pledge than we have been to date," she said. "It's a problem to continue working on."

The New York Times

Cooking in a global energy crisis

ALEXANDER THOMAS AND DIVYA ALEXANDER

Most of us do not think about geopolitics when we turn on the gas stove. But the current global crisis has highlighted an uncomfortable reality: our kitchens are not insulated from instability. Wars and international trade disruptions are affecting the availability and affordability of essential fuels, including liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), used in the kitchens of millions of Indian households.

While LPG has improved convenience and reduced indoor air pollution compared with traditional fuels, it is derived from fossil fuels and remains dependent on global fossil-fuel markets. The current crisis has exposed how vulnerable our kitchens are to geopolitical instability.

This is both a health and an environmental issue. The choices one makes at home are closely connected to the larger crises of our time. Cooking energy is one of the most vivid examples of this connection--and one of the most actionable.

May households still cook using firewood, charcoal and agricultural waste. These fuels may seem accessible, but they carry a heavy cost: deforestation, environmental degradation, and the chronic health impacts of severe indoor air pollution. These burdens fall disproportionately on women and children. LPG improved this picture significantly, but as recent events have shown, dependence on a single fossil-fuel source is itself a vulnerability. It leaves households vulnerable to disruptions caused by war, trade restrictions, or price shocks. The need of the hour is diversification and sustainability in cooking and energy.

The good news is that alternatives exist, and India is better placed than many countries to adopt them.

Electric cooking—through induction cooktops and electric stoves—uses energy far more efficiently than conventional gas. When electricity is generated from renewable sources such as solar or wind power, electric cooking becomes an environmentally responsible option. Paired with India's rapidly expanding solar energy capacity, it becomes a genuinely low-carbon solution. In the not-too-distant future, a household with rooftop solar panels may be able to cook using electricity generated from its own roof. That is energy independence in the most literal sense.

Biogas is another option that deserves greater attention than it currently receives. Household and community biogas plants convert organic waste such as kitchen scraps, agricultural residues and animal manure into methane for cooking while producing nutrient-rich fertiliser as a byproduct. In rural settings, biogas can reduce reliance on both firewood and fossil fuels while strengthening local energy resilience.

Solar cookers, while dependent on sunlight and not a complete replacement for conventional cooking, can meaningfully reduce fuel consumption in sun-abundant regions. And where biomass continues to be used, improved cookstoves that burn more efficiently and produce far less smoke offer a practical, affordable transitional solution.

No single technology will work for every household or every region. But the principle is clear: diversification is resilience. A household that draws on renewable electricity, biogas and efficient stoves is far less exposed to the next global energy shock than one that depends entirely on imported LPG.

The broader point is that sustainability is not only the business of large industries and international climate negotiations. It lives in the everyday choices made in millions of homes. When cooking choices improve across populations, the cumulative effect on carbon emissions, air quality and public health is significant.

Governments have an important role to play through policies that support renewable energy adoption, promoting clean cooking technologies, and making alternatives affordable and accessible. But public awareness matters just as much. Many households are unaware that alternatives exist or that their cooking choices can influence both environmental and health outcomes.

We are increasingly recognising that climate change, environmental sustainability and human health are deeply interconnected. The concept of planetary health tells us that human wellbeing and the wellbeing of the Earth are inseparable. In a world of mounting climate pressures and global instability, the kitchen is no longer just where we feed our families. It is where we make choices that will feed, or fail, the generations that follow.

(Alexander is the chair of the Health and Environment Leadership Platform [HELP], and Divya is an independent research consultant in health policy. They edited the 2021 Routledge publication, Climate Change and the Healthcare Sector: Healing the World)

OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: MARCH 1976

Budget to accelerate growth

New Delhi, March 15
Finance Minister C. Subramaniam today proposed a series of tax concessions and excise duty reliefs in his Union Budget for 1976-77 while at the same time announcing the continuance of the scheme to impound half the additional dearness allowance and the compulsory deposit scheme for another year. With his additional taxation proposals yielding Rs. 80 crores (Rs. 48 crores to the Centre), he left a deficit of Rs. 320 crores uncovered. He expressed confidence that this would not accentuate inflationary pressures in the economy.

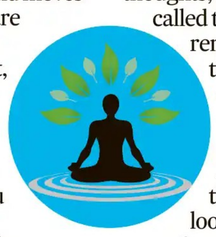
25 YEARS AGO: MARCH 2001

George quits, Mamata pulls out of NDA

New Delhi, March 15
The 18-month old BJP-led NDA government of Atal Behari Vajpayee today plunged into crisis as Defence Minister George Fernandes, Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee and Minister of State for External Affairs Ajit Kumar Panja resigned in the wake of corruption charges revealed by *Tehelka*. Following the footsteps of Mr Fernandes, Union Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar, Minister of State for Railways Digvijay Singh and Minister of State for Consumer Affairs V Sreenivas Prasad of Samata Party also resigned late tonight.

OASIS | SRI M

Search for true happiness



In India, when others were working on improving themselves technologically, economically and scientifically, there was a group of people who were investigating the mind and the inner workings of the human psyche. Therefore, it is quite natural that we have a big body of literature on the search for who we actually are, where we have come from, where we are going and what is the aim of life. The urge for happiness is built into our system. It is not something that comes from outside.

In this little drama between life and death, we think we can find happiness by doing this and that. This constant movement, is the search for happiness.

The Upanishad said that all of life is in constant motion, and that is why it is called *Jagat*, because the word *Jagatyaam* means, that, which is constantly moving. Time is constantly moving and nobody can control it. The mind moves constantly, from the time we are conscious till the time we die. Somewhere in this movement, there is a silence, a quiet. A centre which does not move. *īśā vāsyamidaṁ sarvaṁ yatkiñca jagatyāṁ jagat* This Supreme Being or Reality, you may call it Brahman, *Shunya* or *Poorna*, that which cannot be defined by our ordinary senses, is the root and essence of everything.

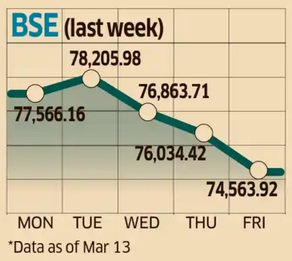
Shunya is That, when everything subsides. When the constant chattering that starts with birth and continues till death comes to an end, then, there is Shunya. *Nirvana* is clearing the mind of all negative tendencies, agitating thoughts, and distractions, Patanjali called this *Chitta Vritti Nirodha* - removing all the *vrittis* from the *chitta*. Then remains an emptiness inside, into which Reality awakens itself. Reality is always with us, inside us. And it is in search of this that we go around this world looking here and there, looking and not being able to find it.

The source from which this universe has come, the Supreme reality, the Shunya, is complete by itself. So our question is, if it is complete by itself, why am I not complete? If I was complete, I would not be doing anything to complete myself. It is that completeness that we seek by trying to expand our activities in various ways.

The question is do we find it? The good news is, *Purnam Idam. Purnam Adah, Purnam Idam*. That means inside us, in the depths of our consciousness, there is an element which is the same *Purna* from which this world has come.

However, we don't see it, because it is covered with so many impurities and modifications. If we can get rid of these modifications, you will suddenly realise that the Supreme Reality, lives in the depths of our own consciousness. Can you imagine how freeing even the very thought is, apart from the actual experience?

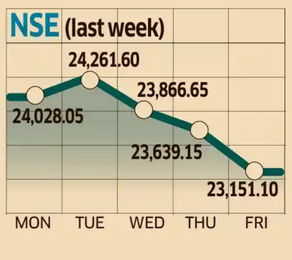
BSE (last week)



*Data as of Mar 13

TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
NTPC	1.05%	LT	-12.86%
POWERGRID	0.50%	ULTRACEMCO	-11.51%
SUNPHARMA	0.09%	M&M	-11.47%
		MARUTI	-11.03%
		BAJFINANCE	-9.99%

NSE (last week)



TOP GAINERS		TOP LOSERS	
COAL INDIA	6.03%	L&T	-12.93%
WIPRO	1.12%	MAHI & MAHI	-12.05%
NTPC	1.01%	EICHER MOTO	-11.54%
POWER GRID	0.60%	ULTRACEMCO	-11.44%
SUN PHARMA	0.12%	INDUSIND BK	-11.27%

Sensex (52-week)

Mar 13, 2025	Mar 13, 2026	
73,829.91	74,563.92	0.99%

Nifty (52-week)

Mar 13, 2025	Mar 13, 2026	
22,397.20	23,151.10	3.37%

10-year Bond yield 6.67%

FALLING RUPEE

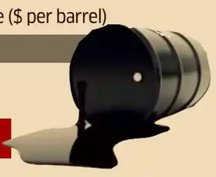
Exchange Rates*

Dollar	₹ 92.30	SGD	₹ 72.22
Pound	₹ 123.20	Yen (100 units)	₹ 57.99
Euro	₹ 106.30		

*Price at which banks sell

Crude Oil Rate ($ per barrel)

BRENT CRUDE
$103.14*
2.67%
*Rate as of Mar 13



Bengaluru fuel pump price*

(Retail)

Petrol* ₹102.92 ₹0%
Diesel* ₹90.99 ₹0%

*Rates as of Mar 14 #Rate change compared with yesterday

Commodity watch

COFFEE

Category	Rate (Rs per 50 kg)*
Arabica Parchment	₹ 22300 - 22800
Arabica Cherry	₹ 12000 - 13400
Robusta Parchment	₹ 17700 - 18200
Robusta Cherry	₹ 9250 - 10000

*Rates as on Mar 12

Other Commodities

Silkworm cocoon (Rs per kg)*

Bivoltine (BV)	₹ 758
Cross Breed (CB)	₹ 731

*Average rates as on Mar 13

The Iran war puts India's dosa and AI dreams on ice

India's push for a more gas-based economy is centered on LNG

ANDY MUKHERJEE
BLOOMBERG OPINION

The war in Iran was always going to creep up on India, the world's second-largest destination for oil exiting the Strait of Hormuz. Surprisingly, the biggest immediate impact has been on dosa and dal makhani. State-owned refiners are forced to eat their losses to keep trucks and tractors moving, but commercial kitchens are starting to crater under a severe shortage of liquefied petroleum gas, or LPG.

In the 1973 energy shock, India's industry leaned on coal, but its homes relied on the erratic availability of liquid fuels. LPG cylinders were a rationed luxury, and all middle-class families had kerosene stoves. The situation has flipped now: buses, taxis, and kitchens have switched to some form of gas to curb pollution. But unlike oil, which can be stored in rock caverns, gas requires super-cooled tanks, or pressurised vessels. India's storage buffer is thin, and therein lies the germ of the current crisis.

Under the Essential Commodities Act, the government has prioritised household cylinders, but commercial supplies have seized up. Restaurants are unable to serve foods requiring continuous high-energy cooking. In the southern city of Hyderabad, the seasonal Ramadan delicacy of haleem —a meat-and-grain porridge requiring hours of slow cooking—is still on the menu because it is prepared in traditional wood-fired kilns. But even there, kitchens are struggling to fry the onions that garnish the dish.

The crisis extends beyond eateries. Huli Spirits, a jaggery rum micro-distillery in Karnataka, home to India's silicon valley of Bengaluru, has decided to halt production. After paying $9,000 a month just for a licence, a shutdown is a gut punch. "All our effort to procure gas has gone in vain," founder Aruna Urs wrote to authorities this week. Retrofitting for coal would take three months, a taller chimney, and new environmental permits — a niche startup like his can't afford any of it, Urs told me.

India's push for a more gas-based economy is centered on liquefied natural gas, or LNG. It isn't alone in this. Across South Asia — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh — energy companies have rolled out a $107 billion bet on imported LNG. India is pursuing the world's second-largest terminal capacity expansion and the third-largest gas pipeline buildout, according to Global Energy Monitor.

Pressing buses and autorickshaws and urban condominiums toward burning the methane contained in LNG was supposed to be a halfway house. India has been making remarkable progress in harvesting solar energy. The idea was to eventually shift demand to renewable sources, reducing emissions, and reining in a historical dependence on the Middle East.

A side benefit was that it would free up local LPG output for use by the less affluent. But there was a catch. The production — basically propane and butane released during the refining of crude oil — didn't keep pace with the new demand that was created by giving subsidised cylinders to 100 million new connections. That campaign is widely believed to have buttressed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity, especially in rural India, where women voters were the most exposed to toxic fumes from burning coal, wood, or cow-dung cakes.

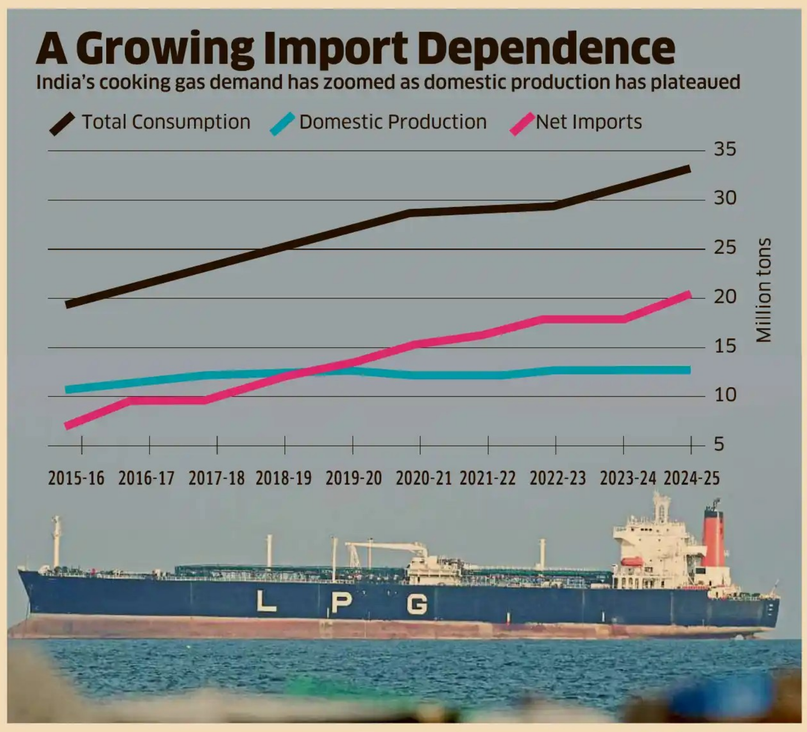
As a result, almost 65% of India's cooking fuel today is directly imported in large vessels, and 90% of that traverses the Strait of Hormuz. The government says household supplies are stable, and it's only misinformation that's leading to "panic booking and hoarding." Still, people aren't taking chances; sales of electric cookers are soaring.

Meanwhile, public facilities like 22 LPG-operated crematoriums across Pune, a large city in India's Maharashtra state, have closed indefinitely, forcing a switch to electric in case families don't want the traditional Hindu option of wooden pyres, which lead to the felling of 50 to 60 million trees every year nationwide. The municipal authority has said it is following the petroleum ministry's orders to conserve gas for household use.

More pain looms for the food economy. Fertiliser plants are suspending production of urea, a critical crop nutrient, as Qatari LNG supplies stall, *Bloomberg News* reported Wednesday. Still, a smaller harvest is tomorrow's problem; today's headache is urban dislocation. If migrant workers or students can't find affordable meals in cities, they may head back to their villages, reviving painful memories of the Covid-19 exodus.

Hopefully, it won't come to that. New Delhi is reportedly in talks with Tehran for safe passage of tankers, though it remains unclear if such movement is feasible from an insurance perspective. A US reprieve for India to buy Russian oil — without reprising last August's 25% punitive tariffs — may keep traffic moving and tractors plowing. A plan to import LPG from America is also underway. While that should please President Donald Trump, the geography is punishing: A ship from Qatar reaches Gujarat in four days; a ship from the US Gulf Coast, dodging Red Sea tensions via the Cape of Good Hope, takes a month.

India's gas transformation was supposed to help modernise the economy, at least until more environmentally ambitious plans like green hydrogen could become practical solutions. Instead, the Iran war has exposed the most-populous nation as a vulnerable commuter on the world's energy highway. It's keeping the home fires burning by cannibalising the very industries that provide much-needed employment to a restive youth. With the dough for the everyday dosa getting cold in the pan, how will India ever pitch itself to AI hyperscalers as a hot destination for their next energy-hungry data centre?



Source: India Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell

Aditya Birla's Indriya eyes 100 stores amid wedding jewellery demand

Plans to double presence in Bengaluru, keen to tap opportunities in Karnataka, Andhra

HRITHIK KIRAN BAGADE
BENGALURU, DHNS

Indriya, the jewellery brand of the Aditya Birla Group, is looking to reach 100 stores in the coming months, driven by sustained demand for wedding jewellery and a market that increasingly values innovation and experiential purchases.

The brand recently opened its 50th store in Koramangala, Bengaluru, adding to its outlets at Phoenix Mall of Asia and Malleswaram. The city will see at least three more stores as part of the expansion — at Sarjapur, Dickinson Road, and Rajarajeshwarinagar. "Most of our stores are high-street, though mall stores are also catching up. Each store ranges from 6,000-8,000 sq ft on average. We are currently present in all key metros except Chennai, and in several tier-2 cities including Patna, Kolhapur, and Aurangabad," said Dilip Gaur, Director, Indriya — Aditya Birla Jewellery.

Dilip Gaur

As part of the expansion, the Mumbai-headquartered brand will also strengthen its presence in Hyderabad, Guntur, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, and Hubballi, with particular focus on Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana.

Indriya was launched in July 2024. A year earlier, the Aditya Birla Group had announced an investment of Rs 5,000 crore to enter the branded jewellery retail business. The venture is housed under Novel Jewels Ltd, which retails under the Indriya brand.

Gaur said the company undertook extensive consumer research before launch. "We spoke to about 10,000 customers across target segments and identified the 25-55 age group as our core audience," he said.

The brand currently offers around 28,000 designs across gold jewellery (70-75%), studded diamonds (about 25%) and polki (3-5%). According to Gaur, the Indian jewellery market is broadly divided into daily wear and wedding segments, with weddings accounting for at least half of demand. "National chains largely operate in the daily wear segment, while the wedding market is dominated by family jewellers. Our strategy was to focus on weddings and build a distinctive position," he said.

Indriya entered the market just before significant volatility in gold prices. Import duty cuts initially lowered prices, triggering a surge in buying, followed by a sharp rise. "In the past 19 months, gold prices have risen about 2.3 times, something unprecedented," Gaur noted.

Despite the turbulence, the company has seen strong growth, with an average ticket size of over Rs 2 lakh, outshining the industry average of Rs 1.5-1.8 lakh. Wedding demand contributes about half of its sales.

Gaur said Indriya's strategy rests on three pillars — a design-led approach, immersive store experiences, and strong technology integration to help customers understand design, craftsmanship, and materials.

Meanwhile, the brand operates on a FOCO (franchise-owned, company-operated) model. "About 27 of our stores are franchise-owned, and most future stores will follow this model," he said.

India's jewellery market is valued at around Rs 8 lakh crore, with roughly 65% still unorganised. However, Gaur expects rising incomes, urbanisation and greater awareness to shift more demand to organised players, with about 5% of the market likely to move from unorganised to organised this year.

Stay patient amid geopolitical tensions: Sebi chief's advice to investors

MRITYUNJAY BOSE
MUMBAI, DHNS

As geopolitical tensions in West Asia continue to disrupt energy supplies, Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey has asked investors to stay patient, while asserting that the country's capital markets are deepening and becoming increasingly resilient.

"Geopolitical tensions are shaping economic relationships. Conflict in West Asia has massively disrupted energy supplies. Inevitably, capital markets have been severely impacted," Pandey said.

Tuhin Kanta Pandey

Addressing the Moneycontrol Global Wealth Summit 2026 here recently, Pandey said volatility has become a defining feature of modern financial markets, particularly as the information environment has evolved and shocks spread quickly across economies.

However, he urged retail investors not to react impulsively to short-term fluctuations.

According to Pandey, episodes of extreme volatility are not new, and markets have historically recovered after major global disruptions.

"The Indian capital markers are deepening, diversified and becoming increasingly resilient. But as markets grow in scale and complexity, they also become more closely connected to global developments. And that brings us to the changing landscape in which today's market operates," he stated.

According to him, efficient capital markets lay a stabilising role in an uncertain world. "They enable transparent price discovery. They help absorb shocks without destabilising the broader financial system. And perhaps most-importantly, they sustain investor confidence. Efficiency is the foundation of trust in the financial system," he said.

According to Pandey, the environment in which Indian markets function is "evolving rapidly".

"One important shift is economic fragmentation. Trade corridors are changing. Supply chains are being restructured and investment flows are responding to these steps. Another major transmission is driven by tech. Algorithmic trading, AI, and advanced data analytics are accelerating the speed at which markets operate. Liquidity conditions are also becoming more episodic," he said.

Pandey further added that global capital flows can move quickly across geographies. However, he stressed that perhaps the most striking change is the velocity of information. "News travels quickly... and markets react almost instantly to narratives. And therefore, the question is 'How do we ensure that speed does not compromise stability in the markets'," he said.

Gen Z to drive $1.3-tn spending in India by 2030, says report

NEW DELHI, PTI: By 2030, Gen Z will comprise 27% of India's population and will command $1.3 trillion in consumption, reshaping consumer markets with a focus on experiences, sustainability and digital convenience, according to a report by Redseer Strategy Consultants.

The report, titled 'Gen Z: Defining Trends, Influencing Spends', analyses how this demographic, born between 1997 and 2012, is prioritising value-driven choices. "This generation shuns labels, valuing inclusivity, self-expression and authenticity. Through this phase of self-discovery, they prioritise aesthetics and new experiences — all of which reflect in their behaviour as consumers," the report noted.

Beauty trends among Gen Z have become genderless, with increasing numbers of young men adopting makeup and personal care regimes.

GULF ON FIRE

How West Asia conflict has exposed India's energy Achilles' heel

SIDHARTH AGARWAL & VIVEK JAIN

Every day, nearly 20% of the world's daily consumption passes through the narrow strait between Oman and Iran. For India, this chokepoint is far more than a geographic landmark — it is a lifeline.

The country relies on imports for about 85% of its crude oil, roughly half of its LNG needs, and 60-65% of its LPG consumption. Of these imports, 40-50% of crude, nearly two-thirds of LNG, and as much as 80-85% of LPG are routed through Hormuz. That dependence turned into a crisis after the US-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, 2026. Global markets reacted swiftly: Brent crude, which traded at $69 a barrel in February, has now climbed past $100, marking a 24% surge. This time it seems like uncertainty is not restricted to high crude prices, but concerns are also mounting over the actual availability of oil and gas supplies for India.

WAR SHOCKS

We believe that the impact could be much broader if crude prices persist at higher levels, as crude tends to fuel general inflation, given its linkages across every sector in the form of raw materials, logistics, and power, among others. Chemicals and paints, which use derivatives of crude as major inputs, could be in for a surprise in terms of margins and capacity utilisation.

The impact of gas is not just limited to price, but more importantly to availability. Gas serves the dual purpose of being used as feedstock and fuel. Sectors like glass and ceramics, where gas as a fuel is irreplaceable, may see an immediate production curtailment or shutdowns. On March 9, the government issued an emergency Natural Gas Control Order, redirecting all domestic natural gas and regasified LNG to priority sectors, even overriding existing supply agreements. Under this plan, industrial users will get 20% less gas, fertiliser plants will face a 30% cut, and refineries and petrochemical units will see a 35% reduction. However, supply for household PNG and CNG for transport will remain fully-protected. Fertiliser factories, already receiving only 70% of the gas they need, may have to cut urea production right before the kharif planting season. India also depends on this region for about 30% of its key fertiliser raw materials like rock phosphate, phosphoric acid, and muriate of potash. If this uncertainty continues, supply chains may break down and global prices of urea and DAP could rise. This would mean that the government might have to spend more on fertiliser subsidies than planned.

In our opinion, emergency interventions may offer short-term relief. However, complete delinking from the global energy markets is unlikely. In any energy disruption, the impact on gas is always higher, given the storage capacity of gas is limited, unlike crude. India today has nearly 30% reliance on Qatar for its LNG needs, which is higher than the global reliance of around 20%. Hence, the impact on India is likely to be higher in the short term. Over the course of the next four years, as new gas contracts are signed, the sources of gas will get further diversified with the addition of new geographies like West Africa and Latin America, among others, and the reliance on West Asia may reduce. Secondly, fertiliser, being the largest consumer of natural gas in the country,

can look at acceleration towards manufacturing of urea from the green hydrogen route. Thirdly, domestic production needs to be stepped up through greater focus on OALP, acceleration of unconventional gas development like CBM and syngas and greater production of CBG under the SATAT scheme. Finally, greater level of hydrogen blending though the green hydrogen route could also alleviate import dependence over the medium term.

In order to lower shocks from crude, India can look at increasing its strategic reserve as commercial reserves may be difficult to increase. Strategic and commercial reserves equal about 60-70 days of demand with Strategic Petroleum Reserve enough for 9-10 days of demand. IEA recommends oil stock equivalent to 90 days of net oil imports. India has successfully scaled up its Ethanol Blending Program (EBP) to 20%, which can be scaled up furthermore to say >25%, which will be close to Brazil's average level of blending. This would also entail increase in flex-fuel vehicle penetration in India. The country also needs to step up its domestic oil and gas exploration, if it wants to move closer to energy self-reliance and look at more acquisitions internationally, provided valuations and geopolitics align.

(Sidharth Agarwal is Analyst, India Ratings & Research; and Vivek Jain is Director, India Ratings & Research)

TOP PICKS

The data is sourced from Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited

Coal India
(ID: COALINDIA)
BUY
Upside +11%**
Last close ₹467
Target: ₹520*

SBI
(ID: SBIN)
BUY
Upside +24%**
Last close ₹1,047
Target: ₹1,300*

Bharat Electronics
(ID: BEL)
BUY
Upside +18%**
Last close ₹439
Target: ₹520*

Max Financial
(ID: MFSL)
BUY
Upside +35%**
Last close ₹1,628
Target: ₹2,200*

JSW Steel
(ID: JSWSTEEL)
BUY
Upside +25%**
Last close ₹1,119
Target: ₹1,400*

* Target price has been calculated on the basis of fundamentals ** Upside refers to more value stock is expected to generate than its current price

Why the old tax regime may still survive the new tax era

For a while, the story seemed settled. The new tax regime had become the default, promised lower rates with less paperwork, and after Budget 2025 effectively ensured no tax liability up to Rs 12 lakh of annual income, or Rs 12.75 lakh for many salaried taxpayers after standard deduction. It looked as though the old tax regime was quietly being pushed toward irrelevance.

The Draft Income-tax Rules, 2026 may force a rethink. Several exemption and perquisite thresholds that had become outdated over the years are now proposed to be revised sharply upward.

Children's education allowance is proposed to rise from Rs 100 per month per child to Rs 3,000. Hostel allowance is proposed to move from Rs 300 to Rs 9,000 per month per child.

Likewise, the tax-free value of employer-provided meals during office hours is proposed to increase from Rs 50 per meal to Rs 200, and the annual threshold for gifts, vouchers or tokens is proposed to move from Rs 5,000 to Rs 15,000. Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad are also proposed to be brought into the 50% salary category for HRA purposes.

These are not cosmetic changes. For some salaried taxpayers, they could materially alter the tax calculation under the old regime. These proposals are still in draft form, but if notified broadly in the present shape, they would apply from April 1, 2026.

The new regime will continue to be the simpler and often more tax-efficient option for taxpayers with limited deductions or exemptions. But for employees with meaningful rent, housing-loan interest, section 80C investments and salary-linked exemptions, the old regime may still produce a lower tax outgo.

B E KUMAR PRASAD
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANT & PARTNER, BALAKRISHNA AND CO

That is why the choice of regime should not be treated as a routine payroll formality. Before declaring a preference to the employer, salaried taxpayers should make a realistic estimate of the deductions and exemptions they are likely to claim during the year. If the old regime appears more beneficial, it is sensible to communicate that position to the employer so that TDS is computed on a more realistic basis.

This is relevant not only for the future, but even for FY 2025–26. A salaried taxpayer may still opt for the old regime while filing the return, even if payroll was processed under the new regime. But that legal flexibility should not be mistaken for practical convenience. Once salary is processed under the new regime, the employee may later have to independently compile rent records, housing-loan interest certificates, investment proofs and other deduction documents, and work out the claim outside payroll records.

The due date therefore assumes particular importance. For Assessment Year 2026–27, the return must ordinarily be filed on or before July 31, 2026 if the taxpayer wishes to validly opt for the old regime. If that deadline is missed, the taxpayer may effectively be left with the default new regime. In cases where higher deductions or exemptions had already been factored into the TDS workings during the year, that could result in a higher final tax outgo, along with interest for the shortfall.

The new regime may still dominate the headlines. Yet, if the draft rules are notified broadly in their present form the old regime may survive not as a relic of the past, but as a practical option for taxpayers willing to do the arithmetic.

Tech powers a smarter health insurance experience

Digital journeys allow customers to understand policies, access services, while removing friction

MAYANK BATHWAL

Health insurance in India is entering a new phase. For decades, the industry operated around a simple promise. When illness struck, insurance paid. That promise remains essential, but is no longer sufficient for a country facing rising medical costs, increasing lifestyle diseases and customers who expect greater visibility and control over their health.

The next phase of health insurance will be shaped not only by how efficiently claims are settled, but how effectively insurers help people manage health risks before hospitalisation becomes necessary. Technology is making this shift possible by changing how customers interact with insurance and how insurers engage with health itself.

Technology allows insurers to move beyond episodic interactions and become more relevant in everyday life. When used well, it simplifies access, improves transparency, and supports preventive health behaviours at scale. The opportunity before the industry is therefore not just digital transformation, but a broader redefinition of value.

Digital enablement driving everyday engagement

Digital enablement is changing the role of health insurance from a back-end financial product to a front-end service experience. Earlier, interaction was limited to purchase, renewal, or claims. Today, customers expect insurance to function as an accessible service, comparable to other digital experiences they rely on daily. Health insurance can no longer operate through delayed responses or unclear processes.

The real impact of digital adoption lies in reducing uncertainty. Health events are stressful, and customers want clarity on coverage, faster decisions, and the ability to act without navigating complex procedures. Digital journeys allow customers to understand policies, access services, submit documents, and track progress in real time. This removes friction at critical moments and strengthens confidence in the system.

Digital capability also enables earlier engagement. Data and analytics make it possible to encourage preventive check-ups, simplify renewals, and coordinate care more efficiently. The interaction shifts from reactive service to timely support.

At the same time, healthcare cannot become entirely digital. Serious diagnoses and treatment decisions require reassurance and human judgement. Advisors, care teams, hospitals and customer support remain essential to the experience. The most-effective model combines digital efficiency with human expertise, ensuring that technology improves access, while empathy and guidance remain central to care.

Rise of wearables, health apps and connected devices

Connected health technologies are also reshaping how risk is understood. Traditionally, insurance relied on static indicators such as age, medical history, or periodic tests. Health, however, changes continuously and is influenced by everyday behaviour.

Wearables and applications offer a more continuous view of health, helping individuals better understand their own patterns and encouraging habits that improve long-term outcomes. This creates stronger alignment between customers and insurers, where healthier behaviour benefits, both through improved well-being and more sustainable healthcare costs.

This shift carries relevance for India, where a large share of healthcare expenditure arises from chronic conditions that develop gradually and are often detected late. Encouraging regular monitoring and early consultation can significantly reduce the severity of these conditions. Technology makes such engagement scalable, while keeping participation voluntary and non-intrusive.

The broader health ecosystem is evolving in the same direction. Initiatives such as the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission and the growing adoption of digital health records are helping create a more-connected system where information moves more easily between providers, patients, and insurers. For customers, this improves continuity of care and reduces inefficiencies across the healthcare journey.

Faster, simpler underwriting and operations

Technology is also reshaping how insurers assess risk and operate internally. Advances in analytics and AI have made underwriting faster and more consistent, allowing straightforward cases to be processed quickly, while enabling human expertise to focus on complex situations.

The objective is not automation alone, but greater predictability and accessibility. When issuance timelines shorten and decisions become clearer, customer confidence improves and insurance becomes easier to access.

As technology becomes more integral to insurance, maintaining clarity, consistency, and customer confidence will remain essential to sustaining trust in digital health insurance.

The road ahead for health insurance

Technology is expanding what health insurance can realistically deliver. The next phase for the industry will depend not only on digital adoption, but on how effectively insurers, healthcare providers, and policymakers work together to make care more coordinated and accessible.

As health systems become more connected, the role of insurance will increasingly extend beyond financing treatment to supporting continuity of care. This will require common standards, responsible innovation, and a shared focus on long-term health outcomes.

Health insurance has always provided financial protection. The opportunity ahead is to ensure it also strengthens the broader healthcare system by encouraging prevention, improving access, and building confidence in how care is delivered. Technology makes this possible, but meaningful progress will come from how the industry collectively chooses to apply it.

(The writer is CEO, Aditya Birla Health Insurance and Member of the Executive Committee, General Insurance Council)

Mcap of top-10 firms tumbles by Rs 4.48 lakh cr

NEW DELHI, PTI: The combined market valuation of the top-10 domestic firms eroded sharply by Rs 4.48 lakh crore last week, in tandem with a steep decline in equities, with banking majors State Bank of India and HDFC Bank taking the biggest hit.

Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex tanked 4,354.98 points or 5.51%, and the NSE Nifty dropped 1,299.35 points or 5.31% as surging crude prices raised concerns over inflationary pressures and global economic stability amid the widening conflict in West Asia.

"The primary driver behind the market weakness was the sustained rise in crude oil prices following the escalating conflict between Iran, the United States and Israel. Brent crude surged past $101 per barrel, raising concerns over India's fiscal position and inflation outlook," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The market valuation of State Bank of India tumbled Rs 89,306.22 crore to Rs 9,66,261.05 crore.

HDFC Bank faced an erosion of Rs 61,715.32 crore to Rs 12,57,391.76 crore.

The valuation of Bajaj Finance dived Rs 59,082.49 crore to Rs 5,32,053.54 crore and that of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) tanked Rs 53,312.52 crore to Rs 8,72,067.63 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank dropped by Rs 42,205.04 crore to Rs 8,97,844.78 crore and that of Bharti Airtel plunged Rs 38,688.78 crore to Rs 10,28,431.72 crore.

Reliance Industries' valuation fell by Rs 33,289.88 crore to Rs 18,68,293.17 crore.

The mcap of LIC diminished by Rs 31,245.49 crore to Rs 4,88,985.57 crore and that of Infosys declined by Rs 24,230.96 crore to Rs 5,06,315.58 crore.

Hindustan Unilever's mcap dipped by Rs 15,401.57 crore to Rs 5,07,640.94 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valued domestic firm, followed by HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, ICICI Bank, TCS, Bajaj Finance, Hindustan Unilever, Infosys and LIC.

WEEK AHEAD

West Asia tensions to keep markets volatile

Elevated energy prices and persistent foreign outflows have added to investor caution

SIDDHARTHA KHEMKA

Indian equities are likely to remain volatile this week as escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia and the sharp rise in crude oil prices continue to weigh on global risk sentiment. Elevated energy prices and persistent foreign outflows have added to investor caution, keeping market direction closely tied to developments in the region. Key economic releases this week include Eurozone CPI, the Fed interest rate decision, BoE and ECB policy decisions, and US jobs data.

Last week, equity markets witnessed heavy selling pressure. The Nifty50 ended [-5.3%], while the Nifty Midcap100 declined [-4.6%] and the Nifty Smallcap250 moved [-3.6%], reflecting broad-based risk aversion across segments. Sectorally, performance was weak across the board, with Pharma (-0.6%) and FMCG (-4.1%) declining comparatively less than the broader market, followed by Bank (-7.0%), while Auto (-10.6%) emerged as the worst-performing sectors. While Nifty50 has declined over 11% since the beginning of the year, Nifty Midcap and Smallcap indices are down by around 10% each. Even in March so far, Nifty has fallen by 8% - the worst monthly fall since the pandemic fall of March 2020.

Recent geopolitical escalation in the Middle East has kept energy markets volatile. Since the onset of the conflict in late February, Brent crude has surged sharply, rising over ₹36% at one point and crossing $100 per barrel, as markets priced in potential disruptions to oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz. For India, which imports nearly 85% of its crude requirements, sustained high oil prices could have important macro implications, including pressure on the current account deficit, currency stability and inflation expectations.

Against this backdrop, the defence sector remains in focus amid continued policy support for indigenisation and domestic procurement. The government has maintained a strong emphasis on capital expenditure in the defence budget, with the Union Budget increasing defence capital outlay by 18% YoY to around Rs 2.2 lakh crore, aimed at strengthening modernisation and domestic manufacturing under the "Atmanirbhar Bharat" framework.

Energy-related disruptions could also have spillover effects on restaurants, QSR and food delivery segments, which may face near-term operational challenges following disruptions in commercial LPG supplies across several cities. India imports roughly 60% of its LPG requirements, with a large share of shipments transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, making supply chains vulnerable to geopolitical disruptions in the region. Restaurants, which form the backbone of food delivery ecosystems, typically maintain limited LPG inventory due to storage constraints, making them vulnerable to supply interruptions. Any prolonged disruption could therefore lead to reduced kitchen operations, shorter restaurant hours or temporary closures, potentially affecting order availability on food delivery platforms. While the situation remains fluid, the development highlights how energy supply disruptions can create operational risks for QSR & food delivery platforms that depend heavily on restaurant partners.

Institutional flows remain under pressure amid heightened geopolitical tensions. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have continued to pare exposure to Indian equities, with outflows exceeding Rs 46,000 crore so far in March, following sustained selling of around Rs 41,000 crore in January and Rs 34,000 crore in December, while February saw relatively modest outflows of about Rs 6,640 crore. The latest acceleration in selling reflects rising global risk aversion following the escalation of conflict in West Asia and volatility in crude oil prices. During March, domestic institutional investors (DIIs) have purchased equities worth over Rs 60,000 crore, providing liquidity support to the market.

However, markets have remained weak despite strong domestic buying, indicating that persistent foreign selling continues to weigh on sentiment. The FII's cautious positioning is also visible globally, with LSEG Lipper data showing that global equity funds recorded their first weekly outflows in eight weeks as investors trimmed exposure to risk assets amid geopolitical uncertainty and rising energy prices. During this risk-off phase, capital has largely rotated toward safe-haven assets such as US Treasuries and gold, while equity allocations across emerging markets have turned more selective. For India, the trajectory of foreign flows will remain closely linked to crude price movements and broader global risk sentiment.

Overall, markets are likely to remain sensitive to developments in the West Asia conflict and movements in crude oil prices. Any signs of de-escalation could help stabilise sentiment, while further escalation may keep risk appetite subdued in the near term.

(The writer is Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Limited)

DH REVIEW

Xiaomi Pad 8: A versatile, mid-range Android tablet

ROHIT K V N
BENGALURU, DHNS

Last week, Xiaomi launched the new Pad 8 series Android tablet, with prices starting at Rs 33,999 in India.

Design, build quality & display

The new Pad 8 carries forward the design language of its predecessor with refinements. It flaunts an aluminium-based metal unibody with matte finish, offering a premium touch to the device, accentuated by smooth, curved corners on the sides. It can comfortably slip inside any regular backpack, not taking up much space. It measures just 5.75mm in thickness and weighs around 485g.

On the back, the device features a circular halo-like LED flash beside the main 13MP camera sensor. It may not replace a smartphone, but does a pretty neat job capturing documents or notes in a book, which can be converted into digital formats with productivity tools available on the Google Play Store. It also supports 4K video recording at 30 fps.

On the front, it houses an 8MP sensor, capable of capturing decent selfies, and videos up to 1080p at 30 fps.

The Xiaomi Pad 8 sports an 11.2-inch 3.2K (3200×2136p) LCD panel, with a 3:2 aspect ratio and 144Hz dynamic refresh rate, while supporting HDR10, Dolby Vision, a pixel density of 345 ppi (pixels per inch), and a maximum brightness of 800 nits. It is good for multimedia consumption and reading e-books indoors. It boasts of a hardware-level blue light reduction feature, and has TÜV Rheinland hardware-level low blue light certification, which helps reduce eye strain when reading at night.

There is also a special model with a nano-texture display that comes with an anti-reflective coating and promises a better viewing experience outdoors.

SPEC SHEET

Display: 11.2-inch 3.2K LCD, with 144Hz dynamic refresh rate

Processor: Qualcomm Snapdragon 8s Gen 4

Camera: 13MP rear, 8MP front

OS: Android 16-based HyperOS 3

Price: Starts at Rs 33,999

The tablet also features an infrared sensor, Wi-Fi 7, Bluetooth 5.4, and a Type-C USB-C 3.2 (Gen 1) port with up to 5Gbps data transfer speed, apart from quad speakers, two on each side (in landscape orientation) to deliver a stereo sound effect. Also, it houses four microphones, which come in handy during video conference calls.

It is a big device with a beautiful display; however, a drop from knee height could dent its structure, while from waist height, the display could easily crack. Hence, it is advised to get a cover case for the Pad 8.

Performance

Inside, the Xiaomi Pad 8 houses a 3nm-class 3.21GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon 8s Gen 4 octa-core processor with Adreno GPU, which promises 32% improved CPU performance and more than 50% stronger GPU performance, compared to its predecessor.

On the software front, the device runs Android 16-based HyperOS 3.0, which works buttery smooth. Apps load faster, and the device shows no noticeable lag when playing games or using gen AI features, such as Circle to Search or the Google Gemini AI app.

The company offers the device in two configurations: 8GB LPDDR5X + 128GB storage and 12GB LPDDR5T + 256GB (UFS4.1) storage.

The Focus Pen Pro (Rs 5,999) supports over 16,000 pressure levels and ultra-low latency of less than 1ms, allowing strokes to appear instantly and feel natural. It also supports rotation, a first for Android-based styluses, offering more control to users for stroke direction and orientation simply by rotating the pen.

The Xiaomi Focus Keyboard for the Pad 8 is made of sturdy material. It attaches to the tablet through strong magnets and instantly establishes a connection with Pogo pins. The keys are tactile and responsive, enabling faster typing.

The device houses a large 9,200-mAh battery, which can last up to 13 hours of continuous video-streaming, and supports 45W fast-charging and reverse-charging capability.

Final thoughts

Overall, the Xiaomi Pad 8 is a cost-effective Android tablet. It sports a really-nice display and delivers smooth performance, long battery life, and fast-charging capability.

Muslims bear the brunt in 36 yrs of J&K bloodshed

Over 41,000 lives lost in three decades of militancy

ZULFIKAR MAJID
SRINAGAR, DHNS

In Jammu and Kashmir, where Muslims constitute over 68% of the population, the human cost of the 36-year insurgency has fallen largely on the same community in whose name militant groups claimed to wage their campaign.

While there is no official religious breakdown of casualties, security officials and researchers say that the overwhelming majority of civilians killed in militancy-related violence were Muslims — a reflection both of the region's demographic profile and the pattern of militant attacks over the decades.

According to official figures, the armed insurgency that began in 1989 has claimed over 41,000 lives, including civilians, militants and security personnel. Data tracked by South Asia Terrorism Portal estimates that between 1989 and 2019, nearly 45,000 people were killed, including around 14,800 civilians, more than 23,600 militants and 6,400 security personnel.

Although official statistics do not break down civilian casualties by religion, analysts and security officials say well over 90% of civilians killed in the conflict were Muslims. Many were political workers, government employees, teachers and ordinary residents who were targeted by militants on suspicion of being "informers" or cooperating with the administration.

In the 1990s, militants frequently targeted grassroots political activists, particularly those affiliated with the National Conference..

The campaign intensified in the run-up to the 1996 Assembly elections, the first major polls held in the erstwhile state after several years of insurgency and central rule. Militant groups called for a boycott of the elections and carried out attacks on campaign rallies, political meetings and individuals associated with the electoral process.

Civilians were also killed in grenade attacks, bomb blasts and indiscriminate firing in crowded marketplaces and public gatherings. Several attacks during the 1990s and early 2000s killed and injured dozens of people at a time.

Security analysts say the casualty figures illustrate a central paradox of the insurgency. "Militant groups projected their campaign as a struggle for Kashmiri Muslims, but a large number of those killed were Muslims themselves," said a Srinagar-based conflict researcher.

INSURGENCY TOLL

- Analysts say over 90% of civilian victims were Muslims
- From 1989 to 2019, casualties included 14,800 civilians, 23,600 militants and 6,400 security personnel
- Political workers, teachers, govt staff targeted
- Violence spiked around 1996 Assembly elections
- Civilians killed in grenade blasts, bombings and firing in public spaces

Vijay appears before CBI in Karur stampede case

Vijay

CHENNAI, DHNS: For the third time in two months, TVK chief and actor Vijay on Sunday appeared before the CBI in New Delhi in connection with the stampede at his party's rally in Karur on September 27, 2025, in which 41 people died.

Vijay, who was at the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) headquarters for over six hours, waved at his fans who had gathered to catch a glimpse of him while coming out of the premises.

The actor-politician was summoned to appear before the CBI on March 10, but a fresh summons was issued for March 15 after the actor sought a fresh date due to his party work.

This is the third time that Vijay has appeared before the CBI as a witness in the case. He was grilled for about 13 hours on January 12 and January 19.

Sunday's development came amid speculation that the BJP and AIADMK were exerting intense pressure on Vijay to join the NDA for the April-May Assembly elections.

However, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami has refuted that his party was in talks with the TVK for an alliance.

Confer Bharat Ratna on Kanshi Ram: Rahul writes to PM

Rahul Gandhi

NEW DELHI, DHNS: Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Sunday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to confer Dalit icon Kanshi Ram with the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, saying he transformed the nature of Indian politics and raised political awareness among 'Bahujans' and the poor.

Rahul's demand on the occasion of the late BSP founder's 92nd birth anniversary was made in a letter to the prime minister, in which he also said that Kanshi Ram devoted his life to making the promises envisaged in the Constitution—equality, dignity and participation—meaningful for those at the very bottom of society.

In doing so, he said, Kanshi Ram strengthened the foundations of Indian democracy and made our political system more representative and just.

His letter also comes two days after Rahul addressed a 'Samvidhan Sammelan' in Lucknow ahead of the birth anniversary of Kanshi Ram, where he said Kanshi Ram would have been made a chief minister from the Congress.

Rahul's repeated references to Kanshi Ram in reverence are seen as an attempt by the Congress to reach out to Dalits, once its core voter base in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere but who had shifted to BSP and later to BJP.

"As we commemorate the birth anniversary of Kanshi Ram-ji today and reflect on his legacy and contributions, I write with a request that he be awarded the Bharat Ratna posthumously. Kanshi Ram-ji transformed the nature of Indian politics. Through his movements, he raised political awareness among Bahujans and the poor," the Congress leader said.

Jayanthi Kumaresh to receive Music Academy's Sangita Kalanidhi award

Jayanthi Kumaresh

CHENNAI, DHNS: Jayanthi Kumaresh, best known for her mastery of the Saraswati veena and for her innovative ideas in taking the Carnatic music to the youth, was on Sunday named for the prestigious Sangita Kalanidhi award by the Music Academy, Madras.

The 57-year-old Jayanthi Kumaresh made the veena her instrument of choice, beginning her tutelage under her mother, Rajalakshmi, and later training under her aunt Padmavathi Ananthagopalan and then the maestro S Balachander. One of the foremost exponents of the Saraswati veena, Jayanthi has also worked on collaborative performances with many musical greats, including the late Ustad Zakir Hussain.

"Apart from being a top-ranking performer in the Carnatic style, Jayanthi is known for her creative programmes to propagate Carnatic music, especially among the young," N Murali, president of the Music Academy, said in a statement here.

Sugandha Kalamegham, who began her musical tutelage at age 13 under Sri Kadayam Krishnamurthy and Sri Gopala Iyer, and Trichur C. Narendran, who was born into a musical family and began his training on the mridangam at age seven, have been chosen for the Sangita Kala Acharya award.

Sugandha also learnt the veena from Sangita Kala Acharya Trivandrum R Venkataraman, besides training in Hindustani music at the Gandharv Maha Vidyalaya, New Delhi. She has been a concert artiste and guru, besides serving on the senate committee of Annamalai University, Chidambaram.

MISCELLANY

◆ COMICS ◆

Blondie

I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU AGAIN AT GINO'S PIZZERIA TOMORROW NIGHT
I JUST HOPE DADDY WON'T MIND ME GOING OUT AGAIN
I WON'T IF YOU BRING ME BACK A LARGE DOUBLE PEPPERONI WITH CHEESE

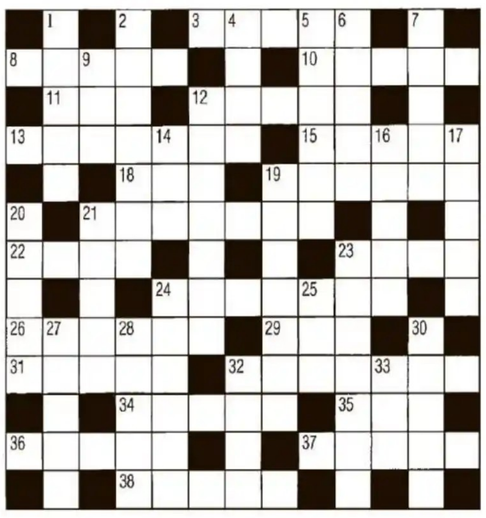
Hagar The Horrible

Beetle Bailey

Peanuts

Marvin

CROSSWORD CHALLENGE 12374



CRYPTIC

ACROSS
3 How to address a motherly horse? (5)
8 The ability to make a prisoner royal (5)
10 Now play around with some darts (5)
11 Chap joining ì19 Acrossî for something to eat (3)
12 It's heatedly destructive and that's bad (5)
13 Free of blame in the way a sailor loves, perhaps (7)
15 Accommodation for some honest soldiers (5)
18 Where to make a start in driving (3)
19 To receive dismissal can mean escape (3,3)
21 Spirited meetings? (7)
22 Historic ship ñ a naval overhead? (4)
23 Stretched to half a week by the Editor (4)
24 A listed arrangement of minor matters (7)
26 The cleaner was not him! (6)
29 Indirect anger? (3)
31 Bad mark for a boy getting out of line (5)
32 Rascally as Jack? (7)
34 Easy to take when slightly reduced (5)
35 Don't starve in a humble attic (3)
36 Pancho's house? (5)
37 That hungry man's pub at Ponder's End (5)
38 An inclination to be less than upright (5)

DOWN
1 They're much less dangerous when they stink (5)
2 Meant never to appear in the paper (7)
4 Sacred area? (4)
5 Makes up for having no eats? (6)
6 An artist took one in (5)
7 It's spoken in urban Tunbridge Wells (5)
9 Lived in Iowa somewhere (3)
12 He takes satisfaction in his ability to engrave (7)
14 Water meadow? (3)
16 A punchy pair? (5)
17 Piano piece to peruse punctiliously (5)
19 Another name for Welsh granite? (7)
20 Demonstrates how to enter a ship (5)
21 So American, this composer (5)
23 Figures to point a ragged sleeve out (7)
24 Two ways to outface with a contradiction (6)
25 The Gershwin who composed an air (3)
27 It's high in housing (5)
28 High ground suiting the sick in outer Hastings (5)
30 A bloomer can bring tears (5)
32 Hank's new title of respect (4)
33 In hiding a heavy heart, nominally (3)

ACROSS
3 Sharply inclined (5)
8 Shish or doner (5)
10 Brings up (5)
11 Chafe (3)
12 Free of obstruction (5)
13 Melodious (7)
15 Tendon (5)
18 Container (3)
19 Relating to cats (6)
21 Principal bullfighter (7)
22 Assist in a crime (4)
23 Lend a hand (4)
24 Not either (7)
26 Lump of gold (6)
29 Girl's name (3)
31 Shuteye (5)
32 Of the stomach (7)
34 Length of metal links (5)
35 Jump on one foot (3)
36 Stopping device (5)
37 Surrenders (5)
38 Legal possessor (5)

DOWN
1 Repeat (5)
2 Natural surroundings (7)
4 Plough (4)
5 Pencil rubber (6)
6 Grave danger (5)
7 Verdant (5)
9 Clippie's vehicle (3)
12 Nightclub show (7)
14 Incision (3)
16 African country (5)
17 Sheds tears (5)
19 Male servant (7)
20 Cautions (5)
21 Fuse (5)
23 Pagan (7)
24 Male relative (6)
25 Belonging to him (3)
27 Extreme (5)
28 Lizard (5)
30 Adder (5)
32 Donate (4)
33 Boy's name (3)

SOLUTIONS TO CROSSWORD 2671

ACROSS: 1 Cordon, 4 Platform, 9 Excite, 10 All at sea, 12 Rosewood, 13 Rental, 15 Polo, 16 Brass tacks, 19 Bed of nails, 20 Warm, 23 Zigzag, 25 As it were, 27 Remedial, 28 Sprint, 29 Entangle, 30 Gazebo.

DOWN: 1 Cheer up, 2 Rock-solid, 3 Ottawa, 5 Lull, 6 Travesty, 7 Onset, 8 Measles, 11 Journal, 14 Useless, 17 Cease-fire, 18 Off and on, 19 Bizarre, 21 Maestro, 22 Utopia, 24 Gamut, 26 Haul.

◆SU-DO-KU-6855◆

5					6	3		
		6	4				9	
				5		4		2
		3		8	9			
2								7
			1	2		6		
8		4		6				
	5				3	9		
		9	7					5

hard

SOLUTION TO 6854

7	8	1	4	5	3	6	2	9
4	3	9	2	6	7	8	5	1
6	2	5	8	9	1	7	3	4
5	1	6	7	4	8	3	9	2
2	9	3	6	1	5	4	8	7
8	4	7	9	3	2	1	6	5
9	5	4	1	8	6	2	7	3
3	7	8	5	2	4	9	1	6
1	6	2	3	7	9	5	4	8

To solve the puzzle: To solve a su-do-ku puzzle, every digit from1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows, and in each of the nine boxes.

SCRABBLE™

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								RACK 1
E1	W4	P3	E1	I1	D2	N1		
								RACK 2
O1	S1	E1	O1	W4	M3	T1	2nd Letter Triple	
								RACK 3
C3	J8	R1	O1	E1	E1	T1	Triple Word Score	
								RACK 4
L1	A1	A1	E1	Y4	M3	A1	Double Word Score	
								RACK 5
E1	I1	N1	M3	S1	A1	A1		

PAR SCORE 205-215
by JUDD

FIVE RACK TOTAL
TIME LIMIT: 25 MIN

DIRECTIONS: Make a 2- to 7-letter word from the letters in each row. Add points of each word, using scoring directions at right. 7-letter words get 50-point bonus. "Blanks" used as any letter have no point value. All Judd's words are in the Collins English Dictionary. JUDD'S SOLUTION TOMORROW

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

P3 L1 A1 N1 T1 E1 R1	RACK 1 =	59
P3 O1 V4 E1 R1 T1 Y4	RACK 2 =	95
C3 E1 R1 I1 U1 M3	RACK 3 =	20
C3 O1 N1 F4 O1 R1 M3	RACK 4 =	64
PAR SCORE 155-165	JUDD'S TOTAL	238

JUMBLE

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

LAKAO

URTFI

PIOUAT

CEKOST

Jumble Burger Inc. has announced a share buyback as they plan to take the company private.
Oh, man! I loved selling that.
At least we'll make money on the buyback.
AFTER THE PUBLICLY TRADED COMPANY WAS TAKEN PRIVATE, ITS SHARES WERE ---

Get the free JUST JUMBLE app • Follow us on Twitter @PlayJumble

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Ans. here: ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) (Answers tomorrow)

Saturday's Jumbles: VIDEO SHRUG ENCORE PASTOR
Answer: The restaurant kept all the info about its waitstaff — ON THEIR SERVERS

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HITORI-3309

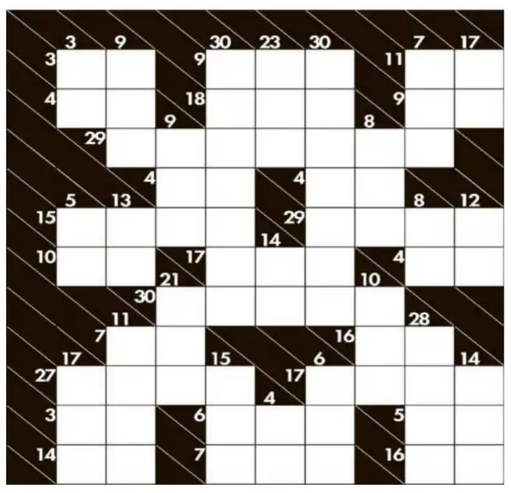
8	4	3	1	7	6	5	4
1	1	2	8	2	4	5	6
2	6	8	5	4	1	3	7
5	4	6	5	2	1	1	4
4	8	1	3	2	7	2	5
2	7	4	1	3	5	4	6
2	1	4	4	5	1	6	8
2	5	2	6	8	2	2	1

SOLUTION TO 3308

■	1	8	■	4	■	7	3
8	5	■	4	1	3	■	7
1	■	7	5	6	■	3	4
3	6	5	■	2	7	1	■
5	4	■	2	■	1	8	6
■	3	4	1	8	6	5	■
7	2	6	■	5	■	4	8
■	8	3	6	7	4	■	5

To solve the puzzle: Eliminate numbers by filling in squares so that remaining cells in that row or column do not repeat that number more than once. Filled-in cells cannot be horizontally or vertically adjacent. The un-filled cells must form a single component connected horizontally and vertically.

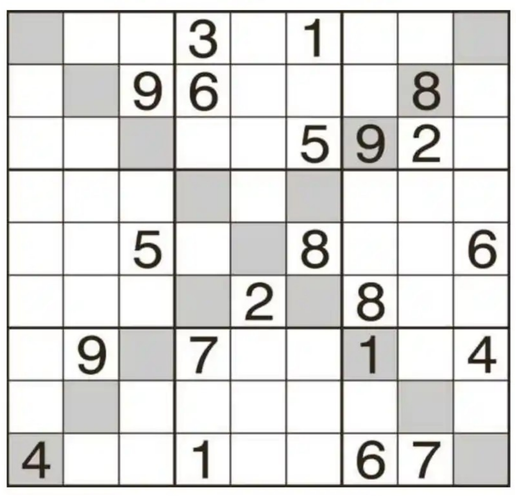
KAKURO- 3309



SOLUTION TO 3308

To solve the puzzle: Put a number from 1 through 9 in a cell. No zeros. A number in a cell separated by diagonal line tells the sum of numbers in consecutive cells at its right or downward. No number may appear more than once in consecutive cells.

SU DO KU X - 3857



SOLUTION TO 3856

5	9	7	1	2	3	4	6	8
3	6	8	7	4	9	5	1	2
4	2	1	5	6	8	3	9	7
2	4	6	8	1	7	9	3	5
8	1	5	3	9	6	2	7	4
9	7	3	4	5	2	6	8	1
1	3	2	6	8	4	7	5	9
7	5	9	2	3	1	8	4	6
6	8	4	9	7	5	1	2	3

To solve the puzzle: The objective is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column, each 3x3 box and each shaded diagonal line contains the same number only once.

UAE orders arrest of 19 Indians over online posts

35 in the dock for posting misleading content amid West Asia crisis

DUBAI, PTI

The UAE on Sunday ordered the arrest of 35 individuals, including 19 Indians, for publishing video clips on social media platforms that contained misleading and fabricated content amid regional tensions due to the Israel-US-Iran war.

The United Arab Emirates' official news agency Wam said the accused have been referred for an expedited trial.

The latest list has 25 individuals of various nationalities, including 17 Indians, listed under different sections, separate from the 10 people, including two Indians, who were named and ordered to be arrested on Saturday. According to a statement released by the Attorney-General Dr Hamad Saif Al Shams, the move follows rigorous monitoring of digital platforms to combat the spread of fabricated information and artificial content intended to incite public disorder and undermine general stability.

Israeli soldiers, border guards gather at the site of a projectile impact from an Iranian strike in southern Tel Aviv on Sunday. AFP

"Investigations and electronic monitoring revealed that the defendants were divided into three groups that committed various acts. These included the publication of real clips related to current events, the fabrication of clips using AI, and the promotion of a state practising acts of military aggression while glorifying its leadership and military actions," it said.

The first group of 10 accused published and circulated authentic video clips documenting the passage and interception of missiles on the country's airspace or the resulting impact. They also filmed gatherings of individuals monitoring these events, appending commentary and sound effects suggesting active aggressions to incite public anxiety and panic.

Such footage risked exposing defensive capabilities and allowing hostile accounts to promote misleading narratives, the statement said.

This group comprised five Indians, one Pakistani, one Nepali, two Filipinos, and one Egyptian.

Israeli PM releases video, mocks at news of his death

Benjamin Netanyahu

JERUSALEM, PTI: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday mocked at the widespread news on social media about his death as he released a video showing him ordering a coffee at what seems to be a roadside mini market.

Speculations have been rife over the social media for about a week questioning his absence from the public space even as rumour increased after a video surfaced apparently showing Netanyahu with six fingers against the backdrop of the US-Israel joint attack on Iran.

On Sunday, Netanyahu posted the video, where he is heard saying, "Great (he tells the seller giving him coffee), Thanks."

When told that there are channels saying he is dead, Netanyahu mocks, "I am dying for coffee."

US Senate to take up bill seeking sweeping electoral reforms

Citizenship proof will be mandatory to cast votes

WASHINGTON, PTI

The US Senate is likely to take up this week a bill that would require voters to submit a proof of citizenship to register to cast their votes in a federal election, a move described as the "number one priority" by President Donald Trump.

The SAVE America Act also requires voters to furnish a photo identity card before exercising their franchise rights and seeks to limit mail-in ballots only for those who are disabled, ill, serving in the military, or are travelling.

A fact-sheet on the White House website noted that India and Brazil have already linked voter identity cards to a biometric database, while the US relies on self-attestation for citizenship before being allowed to vote.

"The Republicans MUST DO, with PASSION, and at the expense of everything else, THE SAVE AMERICA ACT - And not the watered down version. This is a Country Defining fight for the Soul of our Nation," Trump said in a post on social media last week.

The Brennan Centre, a think-tank with offices here and in New York, said that more than 21 million Americans lack ready access to documents such as a passport or a birth certificate.

"The SAVE Act would disenfranchise Americans of all ages and races, but younger voters and voters of colour would suffer disproportionately. Likewise, millions of women whose married names aren't on their birth certificates or passports would face extra steps just to make their voices heard," the Brennan Centre said.

The bill also seeks to permanently ban men from competing in women's sports.

It also seeks to ban transgender mutilation surgery for children.

WORLD AT A GLANCE

French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron attend voting during the first round of France's municipal elections in Le Touquet-Paris-Plage, France, on Sunday. REUTERS

US-China trade talks in Paris to pave way for Trump-Xi summit

▶ Representatives from Beijing and Washington began their economic and trade talks in Paris on Sunday, Chinese official news agency Xinhua reported, reports AP from Beijing.

The meetings, led by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, are expected to pave the way for US President Donald Trump's state visit to Beijing to meet Chinese leader Xi Jinping in about two weeks. The White House has said that Trump will travel to China from March 31 to April 2, though Beijing has not officially confirmed it.

Bessent said on Thursday that his team will continue to deliver results that put America's farmers, workers and businesses first. China's commerce ministry said Friday the two sides are set to discuss "trade and economic issues of mutual concern."

Trump's visit to China will be the first for a US president since he went in his first term in 2017. It will come five months after the two leaders met in the South Korean city of Busan and agreed to a one-year truce in a trade war.

N Korea tests rocket launchers

▶ North Korea tested nuclear-capable rocket launchers, state media reported on Sunday, a day after Seoul detected the launch of around 10 ballistic missiles, reports AFP from Seoul.

The test comes after South Korean and US forces kicked off their springtime military drills, due to run until March 19.

North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un oversaw the testing on Saturday of the multiple rocket launcher system, the Korean Central News Agency said. It said the test involved 12 600mm-calibre ultra-precision multiple rocket launchers and two artillery companies.

Kim said the drill gave Pyongyang's enemies, within the 420 kms striking range, a sense of "uneasiness" and "a deep understanding of destructive power of nuclear weapon", KCNA reported.

Bus carrying Indians plunges down slope in Nepal, killing 7

KATHMANDU, PTI: A passenger bus carrying Indian pilgrims veered off the road and plunged down a slope in central Nepal, killing seven persons and injuring as many others, police said.

The incident took place in Nepal's Gandaki province on Saturday.

A microbus carrying pilgrims was returning from Manakamana Temple when it plunged off the road in Gorkha District, according to the police.

Suraj Aryal, chief of the District Traffic Police Office, Gorkha district, said that the deceased included two women and five men, all Indian nationals who had travelled to Manakamana for worship.

According to Bharat Bahadur BK, the district police office chief, the victims have been identified as Muthu Kumar (58), Anamalik (58), Meenakshi (59), Sivagami (53), Vijayal (57), Meena (58) and Tamilarsi (60).

Seven other injured passengers have been rescued and are undergoing treatment at a hospital in Anbukhaireni, reported the Kathmandu Post.

Ukraine rejects EU pressure over Russian oil

KYIV, AFP

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told his European allies that pressure to re-open the Druzhba oil pipeline carrying Russian supplies was like "blackmail", he said in remarks released Sunday.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy

The Soviet-era pipeline that crosses Ukraine was damaged in a Russian strike in January, Kyiv says. Ukraine says repairs could take up to six weeks, angering both Hungary and Slovakia, which depend on the pipeline for much of their energy needs.

Hungary and Slovakia have threatened to block EU aid to Ukraine unless it swiftly re-opens the pipeline, while the European Commission has proposed a mission to inspect the damage, further pressuring Kyiv.

The war in the Middle East has brought the issue of oil deliveries into sharp focus, with countries worldwide looking for ways to release more supplies onto the market to ease prices.

"If we have decided to restore Russian oil supplies, then I want them to know that I am against it... But if I am given conditions that Ukraine will not receive weapons, then, excuse me, I am powerless on this issue, I told our friends in Europe that this is called blackmail," Zelenskyy told reporters, including AFP, when asked about re-opening the pipeline.

Zelenskyy also hit out at Hungary in his remarks, accusing its government of spreading "anti-Ukrainian sentiment".

Tensions between Kyiv and Budapest over the pipeline have erupted in recent weeks, with Zelenskyy and Hungary's nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban trading barbs.

"We will work with any leadership in Hungary... We are ready to work amicably, provided this person is not an ally of Putin, specifically the aggressor state," Zelenskyy said.

The US-Israeli war with Iran has upended global energy markets. The Strait of Hormuz, a route that once accounted for a fifth of the world's oil supplies, has been virtually paralysed due to the conflict.

Russia -- which invaded Ukraine in February 2022 -- has continued attacking its neighbour, even as global focus shifts to the Iran war.

SPORT

Tesfay sets second-fastest ever women's marathon time

BARCELONA, AFP: Fotyen Tesfay ran the second-fastest race in women's marathon history as she triumphed in Barcelona on Sunday.

The 28-year-old Ethiopian completed the 26.2 miles (42.2 kilometres) in 2 hours 10 minutes 53 seconds in what was her first ever competitive marathon.

Kenya's Ruth Chepngetich set the record in 2024 in Chicago but is currently serving a three-year suspension for doping which annulled her results from March 2025 onwards.

"Today was fantastic -- not what I was expecting, but it is good," said Tesfay.

"My plan was to attack the world record but today there was a lot of wind, I was not able to push in the last part of the race.

Tesfay came in nearly eight minutes quicker than Kenyan runner up Joan Jepkosgei Kiplimo, while Ethiopian Zeineba Yimer finished third.

In the men's marathon Ugandan Abel Chelangat triumphed with a time of two hours four minutes and 57 seconds.

ATHLETICS INDIAN OPEN JUMPS

Purushotham's stunning leap

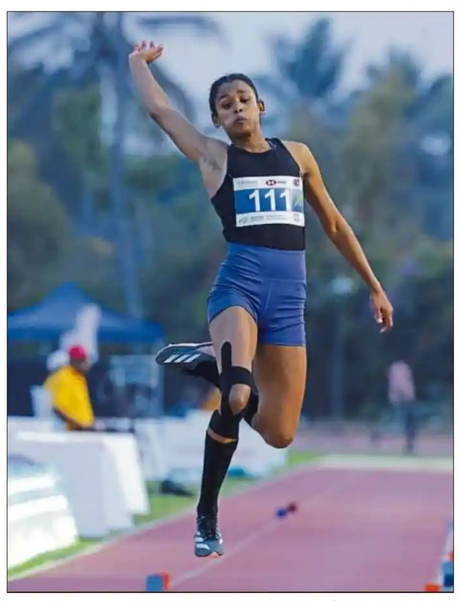
Lakshadweep's Mubassina dominates women's long jump final

ADITYA K HALDER
BENGALURU, DHNS

Karnataka's Purushotham improved on his personal best by considerable distance to claim the men's long jump title on Day 2 of the Indian Open Jump Competition at the Anju Bobby Sports Foundation here on Sunday.

In the women's long jump, young Lakshadweep girl Mubassina Mohammed continued to impress as the 20-year-old athlete dominated the field to her new personal best of 6.38 metres.

Meanwhile in absence of top names like national record holder Jeswin Aldrin and M Sreeshankar, 24-year-old Purushotham grabbed the limelight late in the evening as the young man from Hassan leapt a 7.87m late off his fifth attempt to take the lead from Odisha's Suran Payasingh (7.78) and Tamil Nadu's S Saran (7.77) in a close battle to the gold medal.



Purushotham (left) and Mubassina Mohammed won the men's and women's long jump events respectively during the Indian Open Jumps Competition in Bengaluru on Sunday.

"It took me almost three bad seasons following a ligament injury to improve my previous personal best (7.59)," said Purushotham, whose father is a painter in his hometown. "I am a civil engineer, who chose athletics over my engineering career and the last couple of years were worrying, that's why this result means the world to me."

Big names were missing from the women's jump final too as Asian Games silver medallist Ancy Sojan and World U-20 Championships runner-up Shaili Singh also sat out the event.

It became Robert Bobby George-coached Mubassina's opportunity to shine as she took early lead with jumps of 6.28 and 6.29 before going past her previous best of 6.36 off her sixth and final attempt while competing at her home turf Anju Bobby Sports Foundation.

"I am not too happy with the outcome as I was aiming for Asian Games qualification mark (6.48) and was doing well in training too," Mubassina told *DH*.

Karnataka athletes grabbed further two medals on the day. Long jumper Sakshi Christina Kark took bronze medal with an effort of 5.26m in the women's U-18 behind Haryana's gold medallist Kashish (5.58).

The men's U-18 long jump saw Aaron S took bronze with an attempt of 6.89 behind NCOE Trivandrum's Rajeev Roy, who took gold at 7.45.

Results: Men: Long jump: Purushotham (Kar) 7.87m, 1; Suran Payasingh (Odi) 7.78, 2; Saran S (TN) 7.77m, 3. **U-20: Long jump:** Yuvaraj K (NCOT) 7.63, 1; Ayush Yadav (Del) 7.26, 2; Dhanush Raj (Ker) 7.06, 3. **Pole vault:** R Hariharan Ramesh (TN) 4.55, 1; Ajeet Kumar (Raj) 4.50, 2; Ashish Kr Yadav (MP) 4.40, 3. **U-18: High jump:** Devak Bhushan (Ker) 2.03, 1; Zubin Gohain (JSW) 1.95, 2; Virendra Ranaware (Mah) 1.85, 3. **Long jump:** Rajeev Roy (NCOT) 7.45, 1; Sagar Prajapati (UP) 7.07, 2; Aaron S (Kar) 6.89, 3. **Women: Long jump:** Mubassina Mohammed (ABSF) 6.38, 1; Bhavani Yadav (6.27), 2; Kusuma Ravada (ABSF), 3. **Pole vault:** Baranica Elangovan (TN) 4.10, 1; Sindhushree (NCOB) 3.95, 2; Babita Patel (CISF) 3.90, 3. **High jump:** Pooja (JSW) 1.76, 1; Kevinaa Ashiwin Anna (Rai) 1.74, 2; Pallavi Patil (Rai) 1.71 **U-20: High jump:** Pooja (ABSF) 1.74, 1. **U-18: Long jump:** Kashish (Har) 5.58, 1; M Jenista Shanu (TN) 5.47, 2; Sakshi Christina Kark (Kar) 5.26, 3.

Nishad shines at able-bodied National meet

ADITYA K HALDER
BENGALURU, DHNS

Para high jumper Nishad Kumar finished fifth at the Indian Open Jumps Competition at the Anju Bobby Sports Foundation in Bengaluru.

Para high jumper Nishad Kumar's chill mode was on after finishing fifth with a strong 2.10-metre jump at the two-day Indian Open Jump Competition at the Anju Bobby Sports Foundation.

His presence at the able-bodied national event left many curious as the two-time Paralympic silver medallist was expected to compete at World Para Athletics Grand Prix which culminated in New Delhi on Saturday.

Speaking in a candid conversation with *DH*, Nishad, who lost his right arm in a mishap in his family's farm at the age of six, revealed why he missed out on an event that had national media's attention due to the proximity.

"Who doesn't want to compete in an event that everyone is talking about," said the 26-year-old from Himachal Pradesh. "I know I could have won the gold medal there with a 1.95m jump. But see what I got here instead, a 2.10m jump when I came thinking of 2m.

"This was the very idea when I planned for this event months ahead. For my first tournament of the season, I could perform with nothing-to-lose attitude as no one is expecting a medal from me here.

"Starting the season at 2.10m, now I know that all the hard work from off season is bearing fruit and can build on it for the rest of the season."

So now is he pushing himself for a bigger target for the season? Especially when his season's first performance is not too far from his personal best of 2.14, which is an Asian record in the high jump T47 category.

Nishad, who trains with reputed American coach Jeremy Fischer in Chula Vista, suggests caution as the wiser man has learnt from his past mistake.

"No, I am not setting any targets. I did that mistake in the past by stating in media that I have set this specific target and it came back to bite me. You start taking undue pressure and start thinking of all the what ifs," said the specially-abled athelete before sigining off.

Gulveer breaks half marathon NR in New York

NEW DELHI, PTI

Star Indian distance runner Gulveer Singh added another milestone to his career by finishing third at the globally renowned New York City Half Marathon while also resetting the national men's record over the 21.1km distance on Sunday, delivering a superb performance against a strong international field.

The 27-year-old Army runner clocked 59 minutes 42 seconds to finish behind South Africa's Adriaan Wildschutt, who clinched the top spot with a time of 59:30, while Morocco-born American long-distance runner Zouhair Talbi finished second in 59:41.

The previous national record of 1:00:30 was set by steeplechase specialist Avinash Sable at the Delhi Half Marathon in 2020.

Gulveer is the first Indian distance runner to hold multiple national records spanning events from the 3,000m on the track to the 25km road race.

Gulveer Singh

Gulveer had a good run at the 2025 Asian Championships in Gumi, South Korea, winning both the 5,000m and 10,000m races. This year he is confident of a podium finish at both the Glasgow Commonwealth Games in July and the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya in September.

"I'm fit and looking forward to good results in upcoming major international races," said the Army runner who is currently based in Colorado Springs in the United States.

Chandrika leads India's medal rush

BANGKOK, PTI: India concluded its campaign at the World Boxing Futures Cup with a haul of five medals, including one gold, here on Sunday.

Competing across the Youth Olympic weight categories, the Indian U-19 men's and women's team delivered a series of assured performances.

Leading the charge was Chandrika Pujari, who delivered a commanding performance in the women's 51 kg final to defeat Uzbekistan's Mardonova Nazokat with a unanimous decision to stand atop the podium.

Three Indian boxers finished with silver medals after reaching the finals in their respective categories.

Gunjan (48kg) went down to her opponent from England by a 5-0 decision, while Joyshree Devi (54kg) fought hard but lost 4-1 to a boxer from the United States.

In the men's 50kg category, L Ambekar Meetei also settled for silver.

Silver for Selva at NCAA C'ships

NEW DELHI, PTI: India's Selva Prabhu produced a personal best on his way to clinching the silver medal in the men's triple jump event at the NCAA Indoor Championships in Fayetteville, USA.

Prabhu breached the 17m barrier for the first time, producing a best jump of 17.05m for the 21-year old to also set a national Indoor record.

Kings Gambit calls the shots

MUMBAI RESULTS

Kings Gambit, from the stables of Pesi Shroff and ridden by A Prakash, won the CN Wadia Gold Cup, the feature event of the Mumbai races on Sunday.

1. Haunting Memories Million - 1600M: Break Point (Neeraj Rawal) 1; Zacharias (Zervan) 2; Namiri (Trevor Patel) 3; Thundering Phoenix (Yash Narredu) 4; WB: 1/2, 1-1/2, 1-1/4L; T: 1:35.49; TB: Pradeep Chouhan; Fav: Zacharias.

2. Open Spaces Million - 1200M: Renaissance (Yash Narredu) 1; Santana Row (Trevor Patel) 2; Ashwa Ankara (G Vivek) 3; Jackson (Sandesh) 4; WB: 3/4, 4-3/4, 4L; T: 1:10.92; TB: Mallesh Narredu; Fav: Santana Row.

3. Shapoorji Pallonji Breeders' Juvenile Colts Championship - 1600M: D'Artagnan (G Vivek) 1; Enrich (Yash Narredu) 2; Alexios (Sandesh) 3; Bravion (Antony Raj) 4; WB: 2-3/4, 3/4, 3-3/4L; T: 1:35.93; TB: Pesi Shroff; Fav: D'Artagnan.

4. Forbes Breeders' Juvenile Fillies Championship - 1600M: Vortex (Trevor Patel) 1; Angelisa (G Vivek) 2; Pinnacle (Yash Narredu) 3; Menorca (Sandesh) 4; WB: Snk, 1/2, 3-1/4L; T: 1:37.78; TB: Shazaan Shah; Fav: Angelisa.

5. Maharaja Sir Harisinghji Trophy - 1600M: Zuccharo (Yash Narredu) 1; The Psychic Star (G Vivek) 2; The Milenium Force (Neeraj Rawal) 3; Pride's Prince (Antony Raj) 4; WB: Shd, 2-1/4, 3/4L; T: 1:33.96; TB: Pesi Shroff; Fav: The Milenium Force.

6. CN Wadia Gold Cup - 2400M: Kings Gambit (A Prakash) 1; King Ke (G Vivek) 2; Red Bishop (Trevor Patel) 3; Thalassa (Sandesh) 4; WB: 1, 3-3/4L, Snk; T:2.28.84; TB: Pesi Shroff; Fav: Thalassa.

7. Lahinch Million - 1400M: Neutralist (Trevor Patel) 1; La Dolce Vita (Akshay Kumar) 2; Starseed (A Omkar) 3; Neutron (Nikhil Parmar) 4; WB: 3, Shd, 4L; T: 1:22.66; TB: Aman Altaf Hussain; Fav: Starseed.

8. Poonawalla Stud Farms Auction Sale Stake - 1400M: Rambo (Antony Raj) 1; Queen Of Beauties (Akshay Kumar) 2; Invictor (Trevor Patel) 3; Gunfire (Yash Narredu) 4; WB: 1-3/4, 2-1/4, 1-3/4L; T: 1:22.45; TB: Shazaan Shah; Fav: Invictor.

9. Zavaray S. Poonawalla Sprinters' Challenge - 1200M: Dream Seller (Trevor Patel) 1; Western Star (Akshay Kumar) 2; Credence (Yash Narredu) 3; Social Butterfly (Sandesh) 4; WB: 1-3/4, Nk, Shd; T: 1:09.01; TB: Pradeep Chouhan; Fav: Dream Seller.

10. Ahead Of My Time Million - 1200M: Manor House (Yash Narredu) 1; American Eagle (Aditya Waydande) 2; Shirsha (SG Prasad) 3; Charlie Brown (Akshay Kumar) 4; WB: Shd, 2-1/2, 1/2L; T: 1:09.36; TB: Aman Altaf Hussain; Fav: Manor House.

Bengaluru dividends

I race: Rs 33w; 12, 12, 13p; Fc: Rs 96; Q: Rs 36; Shp: Rs 31; Thp: Rs 36; Tri: Rs 126 & 90; Ex: Rs 304 & 172. **II race:** Rs 56w; 18, 10, 14p; Fc: Rs 148; Q: Rs 55; Shp: Rs 34; Thp: Rs 40; Tri: Rs 341 & 206; Ex: Rs 820 & 276. **III race:** Rs 15w; 10, 14, 12p; Fc: Rs 60; Q: Rs 65; Shp: Rs 43; Thp: Rs 30; Tri: Rs 257 & 67; Ex: Rs 921 & 643. **IV race:** Rs 44w; 20, 10p; Fc: Rs 77; Q: Rs 18; Shp: Rs 30; Thp: Rs; 23; Tri: Rs 98 & 71; **V race:** Rs 68w; 20, 14, 15p; Fc: Rs 270; Q: Rs 110; Shp: Rs 32; Thp: Rs 40; Tri: Rs 799 & 231; Ex: Rs 3,077 & 1,079. **VI race:** Rs 45w; 11, 21, 14p; Fc: Rs 517; Q: Rs 268; Shp: Rs 48; Thp: Rs 42; Tri: Rs 1,080 & 625; Ex: Rs 3,295 & 1,294. **VII race:** Rs 21w; 10, 29, 11p; Fc: Rs 190; Q: Rs 195; Shp: Rs 69; Thp: Rs 47; Tri: Rs 480 & 100; Ex: Rs 4,692 & 3,351.**VIII race:** Rs 238w; 46, 19, 10p; Fc: Rs 1.425; Q: Rs 811; Shp: Rs 57; Thp: Rs 65; Tri: Rs 5,347 & 1,309; Ex: Rs 77,991 (c/o). **IX race:** Rs 29w; 14, 17, 15p; Fc: Rs 190; Q: Rs 128; Shp: Rs 43; Thp: Rs 47; Tri: Rs 1,240 & 478; Ex: Rs 4,134 & 817. **X race:** Rs 34w; 17, 33, 18p; Fc: Rs 1,601; Q: Rs 603; Shp: Rs 88; Thp: Rs 70; Tri: Rs 5,360 & 2,297; Ex: Rs 42,155 & 54,200 & 527.

I jackpot: Rs 20,515 (15). **Runner-up:** Rs 3,217 (41). **II jackpot:** Rs 1,41,115 (6). **Runner- up:** Rs 5,416 (67). **I treble:** Rs 1,812 (33). **II treble:** Rs 5,007 (10). **III treble:** Rs 9,494 (9).

Nonpariel for main event

HYDERABAD SELECTION

Donald Netto-trained Nonpariel is fancied to win the Time And Place Plate, the feature event of the Hyderabad races to be run over a distance of seven furlongs at the races on Monday. The first race starts at 3 pm.

1. Own Opinion Plate - 1200M: La Fleuriere 1, Beverley 2, Kitsune 3.
2. Elusive Hero Plate - 1400M: Corte Madera 1, Miss Smiley Angel 2, Certainity 3.
3. Democracy Plate - 1600M: Cape May 1, Real Thalaiva 2, Silver Arrow 3.
4. Armagnac Plate - 1200M: Mix The Magic 1, Bold Beauty 2, Her Ladyship 3.
5. Himalaya Plate - 1400M: Garfunkle 1, Northern Sky 2, Paththku 3.
6. Time And Place Plate - 1400M: Nonpariel 1, Vivaldo 2, Truth 3.
7. Bloomer Plate - 1200M: Deccan Ranger 1, Muaser 2, Always Special 3.
Day's best: Cape May.
Jackpot: 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7. **I treble:** 2, 3 & 4.
II treble: 5, 6 & 7.

Diksha finishes T-45 in Aus Open

ADELAIDE, PTI: Diksha Dagar finished as the top Indian at the Women's Australian Open with a tied 45th place after carding two-over 72 on the final day.

Of the other Indian women in the field Avani Prashanth (74) was T-49 and Vani Kapoor (80) was 66th.

Avani had rounds of 77-72-72-74 for a 7-over total of 295 while Vani carded 72-74-80-80 and a total of 306.

◆ ON TV ◆

FOOTBALL

ISL: Punjab FC vs FC Goa (**7:30 pm**). **LIVE** on **Sony Sports Network, FanCode.**

CRICKET BCCI AWARDS

Night to savour for Binny, Dravid

Shubman, Smriti adjudged Best International Cricketers

NEW DELHI, PTI

Prolific batters Shubman Gill and Smriti Mandhana were named the Best International Cricketers (Men's and Women's) at the BCCI Naman Awards 2026 here on Sunday, recognising their outstanding performances in the 2024–2025 season.

Gill won the prestigious Polly Umrigar Award, while Mandhana received the award for the fifth time.

For Gill, it was his second Cricketer of the Year award after first winning it in 2023.

Former stars Roger Binny, Rahul Dravid and Mithali Raj were honoured with the Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award, the BCCI's highest honour, recognising their outstanding service to Indian cricket.

India's five trophy-winning sides (2025 ICC Champions Trophy, 2025 Women's ODI World Cup, 2025 U-19 Women's World Cup, 2026 Men's U-19 World Cup, and 2026 T20 World Cup) were honoured as well on the occasion.

Gill enjoyed a stellar 2025 and established himself as one of the team's most dependable batters in the longer formats.

"Firstly, thank you to the BCCI for recognising me with this award. Many greats and legends of Indian cricket have received it before, so it is a huge honour for me to be here. What we as an Indian cricket group were able to achieve last year was truly tremendous - five ICC trophies, something I don't think has ever happened before," Gill said.

"I want to thank my teammates because none of this would have been possible without them. I would also like to thank my parents and family members for helping me reach where I am today. Thank you once again," Gill added.

On the tour of England, skipper Gill led from the front in the five-Test series, finishing as the top run-getter with 754 runs in 10 innings at an average of 75.40, including four centuries and a top score of 269. Gill also played a pivotal role in India's Champions Trophy triumph last year, having entered the tournament as the No.1-ranked ODI batter in the world. He made an unbeaten 101 against Bangladesh in India's opening match, and finished the tournament with 188 runs.

Mandhana ended 2025 with 1,703 international runs, including 1,362 in ODIs, the most by any woman in a calendar year. In doing so, Mandhana became the first batter in women's ODI history to score 1,000 runs in a single calendar year.

Vice-captain Mandhana made handsome contributions to India's maiden Women's World Cup title triumph, aggregating 434 runs in nine matches to end as the tournament as India's leading run-scorer and the second-highest overall.

Shafali Varma (Best Woman Cricketer Senior Domestic One-Day), Ira Jadhav (Best Woman Cricketer (Domestic), Harsh Dubey (Best All Rounder in the Ranji Trophy), and Ayush Mhatre (Best All Rounder in Domestic Limited Overs Competitions) too won awards for their strong performances across the 2024-25 domestic season.

Mohammed Siraj (left) and Sanju Samson pose with the ICC T20 World Cup trophy at the BCCI Naman Awards ceremony in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

Dravid delighted with India's success

NEW DELHI, PTI

Former India captain and head coach Rahul Dravid on Sunday said the country's rich cricketing potential is now translating into tangible success, with a string of victories in global tournaments reflecting the talent long present in Indian cricket.

India have been on a winning spree in ICC events winning each of the last two men's T20 World Cups, women's ODI World Cup, men's U-19 World Cup as well as the women's U-19 T20 World Cup over the last two years.

Dravid, honoured with the Col CK Nayudu Lifetime Achievement Award during the BCCI's annual awards

Rahul Dravid

function, told Star Sports, "It just kind of feels right, right?"

"Almost everything coming together at this point of time where Indian cricket has always had great potential and it's (about) realising that potential on the field as well. Off the field, I think we've always had everything we needed and on the field, it's been great to see that potential being realised."

Dravid said the success is due to various factors, from players to administrators and fans, coming together.

"It's been phenomenal. It's just been amazing to see the way Indian cricket has grown over these three decades," he said reflecting from the time he made his debut in 1996.

"Indian cricket has always had amazing talent. We've always had really good administrators. We've always had really good coaches (and) we've been able to back that up with incredible infrastructure. We've always had a fantastic domestic system, (a) very good junior cricket system."

"... and some of the most incredible fans in the world. The kind of supporters and fans that we have, deserved all of this to come together, to have success on the field. It's amazing to see how that all of that is coming together now."

Dravid, who coached India to the T20 World Cup win in 2024, credited the current side for living up to the expectations.

"It was just lovely to see... Just the performance of the world T20 side, the expectations were immense. They started off as favourites, and it's not always easy," Dravid said.

"But it's not always easy to start off as favourites and be there right at the end and lift a trophy. It comes with its own pressures, its own challenges."

Medvedev snaps Alcaraz's red-hot streak to set up Sinner final

INDIAN WELLS, AFP: Daniil Medvedev ended Carlos Alcaraz's perfect start to 2026, stunning the world No.16-3, 7-6 (3) on Saturday to book an Indian Wells title clash with Jannik Sinner.

Medvedev avenged losses to Alcaraz in back-to-back Indian Wells finals in 2023 and 2024, using an impressive service display and aggressive play from the baseline to keep the Spanish star on the back foot throughout.

"Super happy to beat someone as strong as he (is)," Medvedev said. "It's a great feeling."

He'll have his work cut out for him again in Sunday's clash with four-time Grand Slam champion Sinner, who beat fourth-ranked Alexander Zverev 6-2, 6-4.

Alcaraz, 22, became the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam with his Australian Open triumph this year. He followed with a title in Qatar and took a 16-0 2026 record into Saturday's contest.

But Medvedev was up to the challenge, last month's Dubai champion running Alcaraz ragged in the intense desert heat as he pushed his own ATP win streak to nine matches.

"I just felt like the long rallies, especially when you play against Daniil, that the rallies are long, that you have to increase all the power in almost every shot," Alcaraz said.

"So it feels like you're wasting extra energy after every shot. And with the heat, sometimes it's really tricky to deal with all of that."

Medvedev's form, after a disappointing 2025 campaign in which he fell as low as 18th in the world, has caught Sinner's eye.

"He's back to very, very high level, very big serve. He's returning very well, very deep," Sinner said of the 2021 US Open champion.

Teen Antonelli soars in Shanghai

SHANGHAI, AFP

An emotional Kimi Antonelli won a grand prix for the first time on Sunday in China ahead of Mercedes team-mate George Russell and Lewis Hamilton, who made his maiden podium for Ferrari.

The 19-year-old Antonelli converted being the youngest pole-sitter in Formula One history into victory after both McLarens dramatically failed to start the Shanghai race.

Antonelli briefly lost the lead at the start but once he got back in front he controlled the pace to cruise home to the chequered flag by more than five seconds from Russell. Charles Leclerc was fourth in the second Ferrari.

"I'm speechless, I'm about to cry to be honest," said Antonelli as he choked back tears.

Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli celebrates on the podium after winning the Chinese Grand Prix on Sunday. AFP

"Thank you to the team for helping me to achieve this dream."

It was an almost flawless drive from the youngster, apart from one heart-fluttering moment when he locked up at the hairpin on his penultimate lap.

But he recovered to avoid nothing more damaging than a small excursion off track.

"I really wanted to bring Italy back to the top and we did today. Even if I gave myself a little bit of a heart attack towards the end a flat spot," Antonelli added.

Early championship leader Russell was full of praise for his young teammate after the dominant Mercedes team secured a one-two for the second race running.

"A huge congratulations to Kimi because it's always very special to win your first race," said Russell, whose lead has been cut to four points by Antonelli.

The Italian replaced Hamilton at Mercedes and the seven-time world champion said he could not be more pleased for the teenager and his old team.

"I'm so so happy for you buddy, and I'm so honoured to be able to share this moment with him," said Hamilton.

Raphinha 'tricks as Barcelona hammer listless Sevilla

BARCELONA, AFP: Raphinha **(in pic)** bagged a hat-trick as Barcelona thrashed Sevilla 5-2 to restore their four-point lead at the top of La Liga on Sunday.

After Real Madrid cut the gap by beating Elche on Saturday the Spanish champions responded by romping to a comfortable victory.

Dani Olmo and Joao Cancelo also struck for Hansi Flick's side, who host Newcastle in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Fans streamed to the stadium before the game to vote in the club's presidential elections, with either Joan Laporta or Victor Font to be announced the new chief later on Sunday night.

They gave midfielder Gavi an ovation when he made his return from a severe knee injury late on. "It has been very tough, if I'm honest," Gavi told DAZN of his recovery process, on his first appearance since August.

The Spain international also missed most of the 2023/24 season out injured.

Results: On Sunday: Real Mallorca: 2 (Torre 65th, Costa 88th) bt Espanyol: 1 (Pickel 36th); Barcelona: 5 (Raphinha 9th, 21st, 51st, Olmo 38th, Cancelo 60th) bt Sevilla: 2 (Oso 45+4, Sow 90+2).

On Saturday: Girona: 3 (Rincon 4th, Ounahi 77th, Echeverri 90+2) bt Athletic Bilbao: 0; Atletico Madrid: 1 (Molina 8th) bt Getafe: 0; Real Oviedo: 1 (Costas 30th) bt Valencia: 0; Real Madrid: 4 (Rudiger 39th, Valverde 45th, Huijsen 66th, Guler 89th) bt Elche: 1 (Manuel Angel 85th)

Mokoena makes hay as SA romp past NZ

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, AFP: A new-look South Africa scythed through New Zealand's batting lineup to comfortably win Sunday's first Twenty20 international by seven wickets, with 20 balls to spare.

The visitors' seam attack proved unplayable early on as World Cup finalists New Zealand were reduced to 36-5 before being dismissed for 91 in the 15th over, their 10th lowest total in T20s.

South Africa eased to 93-3 in response, with opener Connor Esterhuizen's unbeaten 45 off 48 balls ensuring they would claim early honours in the five-match series.

Brief scores: New Zealand: 91 all out in 14.3 overs (James Neesham 26; Gerald Coetzee 2-14, Nqobani Mokoena 3-26, Ottneil Baartman 2-22, Keshav Maharaj 2-25)
It to South Africa: 93/3 in 16.4 overs (Connor Esterhuizen 45 n.o.). **Result:** SA won by 7 wkts.
PoM: Nqobani Mokoena.

Resurgent United sink bungling Villa to boost top-four bid

LONDON, AFP: Manchester United bolstered their bid to qualify for the Champions League with a vital 3-1 win against top-four rivals Aston Villa on Sunday.

Michael Carrick's side took the lead through Casemiro's second-half opener at Old Trafford before Ross Barkley hauled Villa level.

United finished strongly, with Matheus Cunha and Benjamin Sesko scoring in the closing stages to seal Carrick's seventh win in nine games since taking over as interim boss.

Sitting third in the Premier League, United are three points clear of fourth-placed Villa in the race to reach the Champions League via a top-four finish.

United's latest victory came after an 11-day break since the first defeat of his reign at Newcastle and Carrick celebrated with a jig of delight on the touchline after Sesko wrapped up the points.

Arsenal win

Max Dowman **(in pic)**, 16, propelled Arsenal closer to the title by becoming the Premier League's youngest ever goalscorer in a dramatic 2-0 win against Everton on Saturday as Manchester City stumbled in a 1-1 draw at West Ham. Mikel Arteta's men are edging towards a first league title in 22 years as their advantage over City, who have a game in hand, now stands at nine points.

Results: On Sunday: Crystal Palace: 0 drew with Leeds: 0; Manchester United: 3 (Casemiro 53rd, Cunha 71st, Sesko 81st) bt Aston Villa: 1 (Barkley 64th); Nottingham Forest: 0 drew with Fulham: 0

On Saturday: West Ham: 1 (Mavropanos 35th) drew with Man City: 1 (Silva 31st); Arsenal: 2 (Gyokeres 89th, Downman 90th+7) bt Everton: 0; Chelsea: 0 lt to Newcastle: 1 (Gordon 18th)

Vimal requests BWF prez to reconsider proposed scoring system changes

HITA PRAKASH
BENGALURU, DHNS

Joining the growing list of names voicing their opinion about the proposed changes to the scoring system, former player and coach U Vimal Kumar formally reached out to the president of the Badminton World Federation (BWF) to reconsider the suggested modifications and listed 10 core recommendations in his letter.

In February, the BWF proposed to change the scoring system from the existing best-of-three games of 21 points each to best-of-three games of 15 points each. The suggestion, however, has largely caused discomfort and drawn the ire of several former and current players along with coaching staff from around the world.

"While I fully support BWF's long-term vision for the sport, I strongly believe that altering the existing scoring system risks diluting the core essence of badminton - its physical toughness, tactical depth and mental resilience," the 63-year-old Vimal has stated in his letter to Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul, who became the first woman BWF president when the 61-year-old Thai began her four-year tenure in April 2025.

Former international player and coach Vimal Kumar wants BWF to retain the existing best-of-three 21-point scoring system. DH FILE PHOTO

"The current 21-point best-of-three format is working extremely well and should not be compromised without exhaustive consultation. I respectfully urge BWF to consider these points carefully before implementing irreversible changes," Vimal wrote.

Requesting the world badminton body to retain the 21-point format for men's and women's singles, respectively, especially at the Tour 1000 and 750 events, the Indian Olympian has also suggested: "If experimentation is required, restrict the 15-point format to Tour 500 and lower-tier events, or to non-singles disciplines."

Further, extending tournament duration rather than shortening matches, additional rest days to improve match quality and player longevity, better scheduling of calendar, conducting the World Championships once every three years with prize money, are some of the other 10 key recommendations made by Vimal.

"Rotate major events over a three-year cycle: Year 1: Sudirman Cup; Year 2: Thomas & Uber Cup; Year 3: World Championships. Reform Thomas & Uber Cup by reintroducing home-and-away matches on the lines of the Davis Cup in tennis. Increase Tour 1000 and 750 event draws to 64 players," also found a mention by Vimal.

WI players, staff return home

NEW DELHI, PTI : West Indies players and support staff have safely returned home after being left stranded in India following the T20 World Cup due to travel disruptions caused by the West Asia conflict, Cricket West Indies (CWI) said.

The ongoing war between US-Israel and Iran threw travel plans into disarray, leaving West Indies and South African teams stranded in Kolkata due to closure of air space and airports at major transit points like Dubai.

The West Indies played their final T20 World Cup matches in Kolkata on March 1.

The ICC on Thursday had announced that the last batch of the players departed.

Printed and published by B A Ravi on behalf of The Printers (Mysore) Private Ltd, at The Printers (Mysore) Private Ltd, Plot nos. 7-12, Kumbalgodu Industrial Area, Bengaluru - 560 074. Executive Editor: K V Subramanya (Responsible for selection of news under the PRB Act). Editorial Office: 75, M.G. Road, Bengaluru - 560 001. E-mail: editor@deccanherald.co.in. Phone: 080-45557333, Editorial: 080-45557279/080-45557280, Circ: 080-45557204, Advt: 080-45557163/080-45557164. Also printed at Hubballi-Dharwad, Mangaluru, Kalaburagi, Davangere, Mysuru and Hosapete. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. RNI No 3608/57. Registered, Regn. No: KRNA/BGE/1027/2023-2025, posted at Bangalore PSO, Mysore Road, Bengaluru - 560 026. Website: www.printersmysore.com